METEOR™

MARVEL COMICS SUPER SPECIAL

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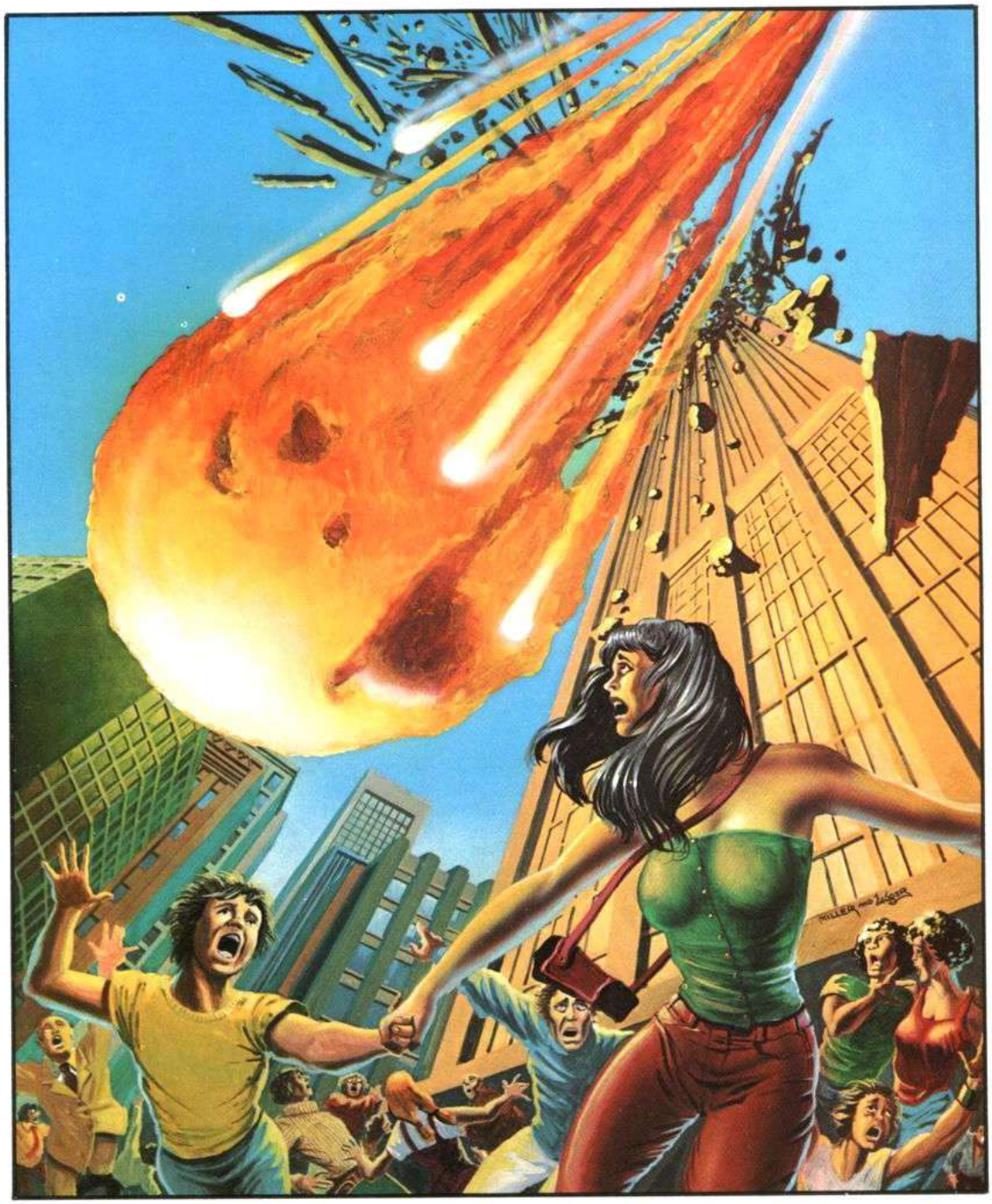

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Also: An Interview with Hollywood's Leading Special-Effects Man!
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STAN LEE PRESENTS:

METEOR™

A MARVEL COMICS SUPER SPECIAL #14

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FALL/OCTOBER 1979

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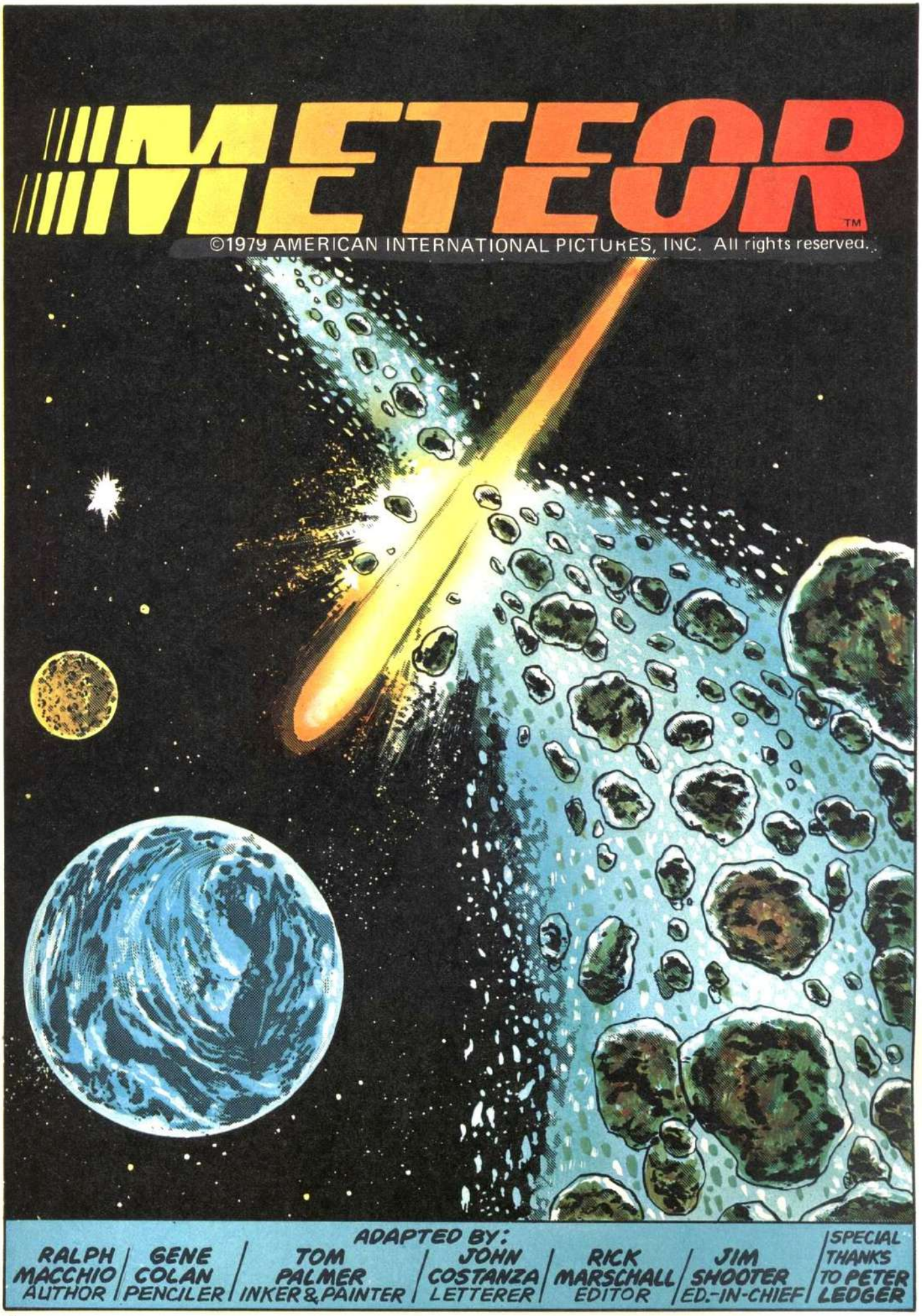
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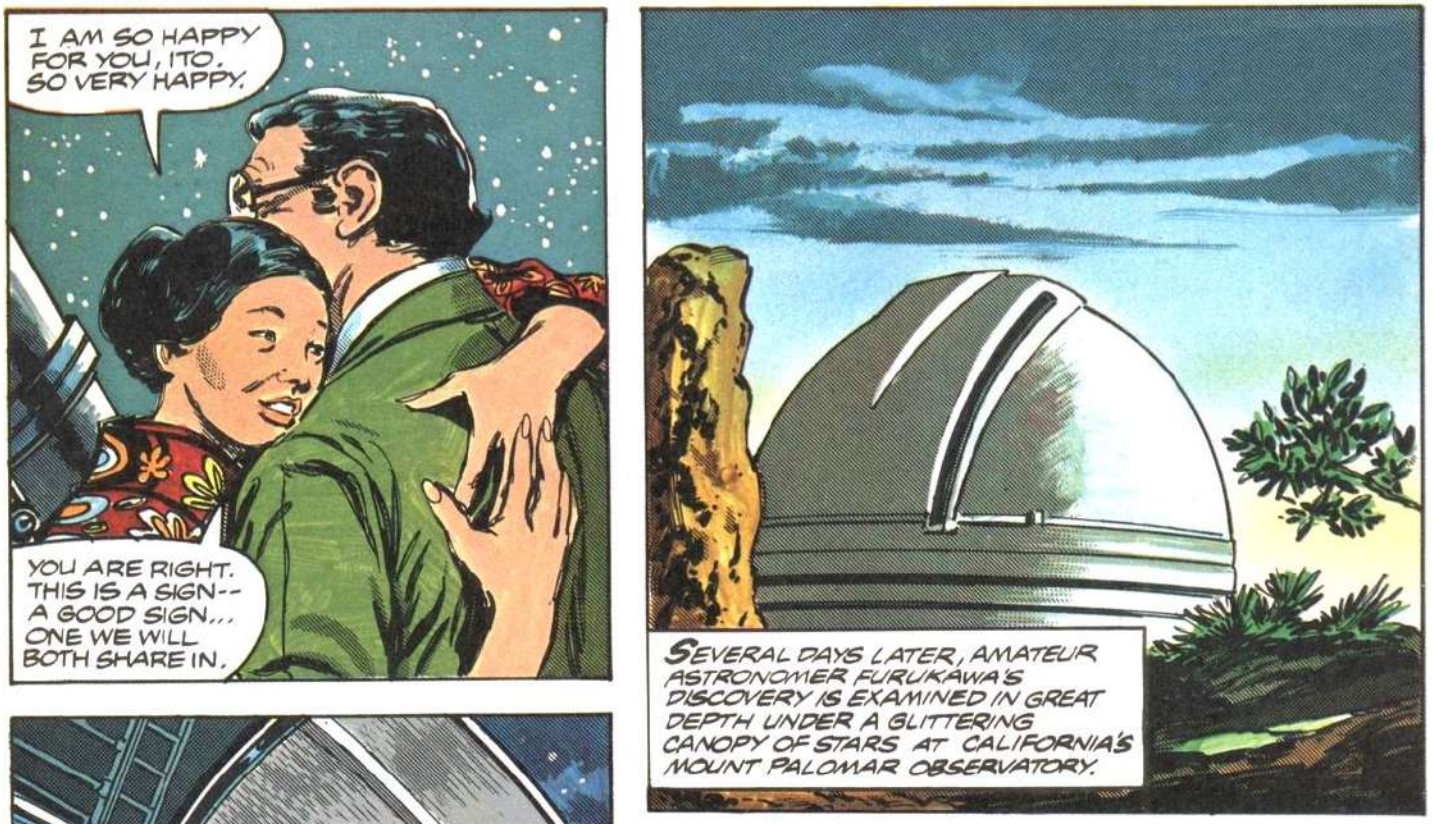
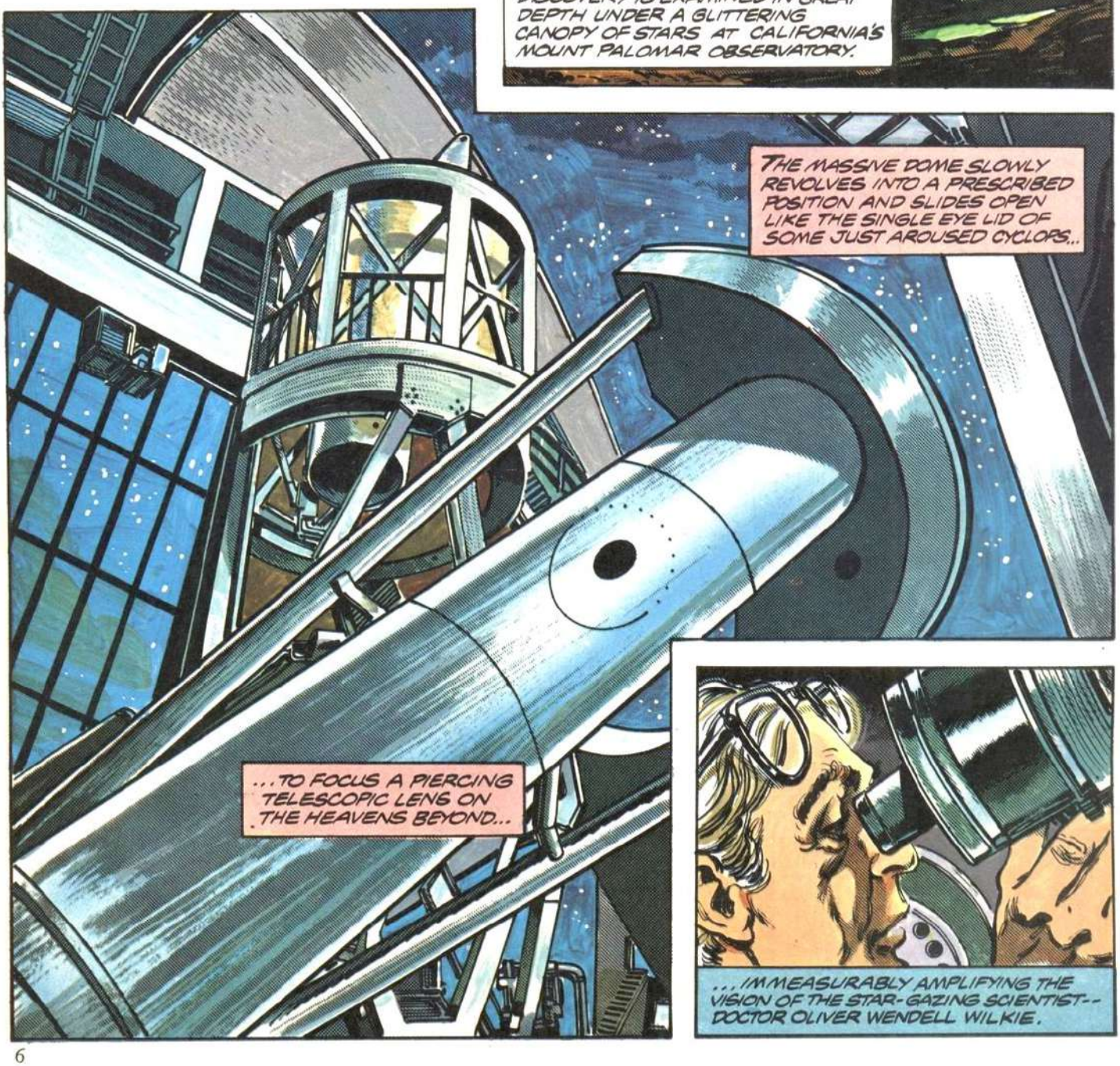
SPECIAL THANKS TO PETER LEDGER

IN THE LATE SUMMER OF MID-1979, THE CALM OF A SMALL HONG KONG SUBURB IS SHATTERED BY A CRY OF TRIUMPH BURSTING FROM ONE SMALL DWELLING...
MACHIKO! MACHIKO!
...A CRY WHOSE REVERBERATIONS WILL SOON SHAKE THE WORLD WITH THEIR HORRIFYING CONSEQUENCES.
ITO FURUKAWA IS NORMALLY THE VERY IMAGE OF THE COOL, CALCULATING BUSINESSMAN--EXCEPT WHERE HIS OVERWHELMING PASSION FOR ASTRONOMY IS CONCERNED.
PLEASE! YOU MUST COME WITH ME TO THE TERRACE! THERE IS SOMETHING I HAVE TO SHOW YOU!
I AM COMING, ITO. THERE IS NO NEED TO DRAG ME.
WE MUST HURRY BEFORE IT IS GONE.
CAN YOU SEE IT? YOU MUST LOOK CLOSELY.
I--I SEEM TO SEE A GLOWING STREAK OF SOME SORT MOVING ACROSS THE SKY.
YES! THAT IS IT. AND I HAVE CAPTURED IT ON FILM FOR THE WHOLE WORLD TO SEE.
IT IS A SIGN, MACHIKO. A SIGN OF CELESTIAL SIGNIFICANCE... ONE THEY WILL SOON CALL--
--FURUKAWA'S COMET!

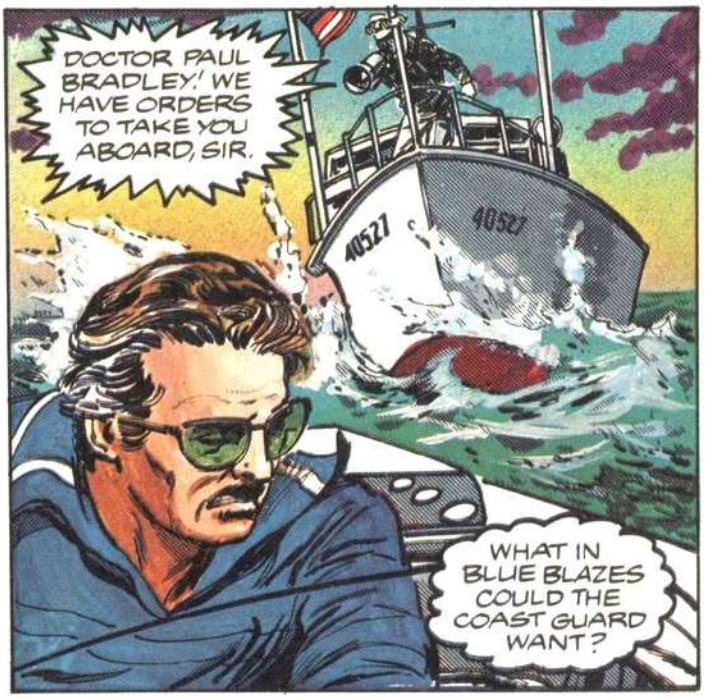

I AM SO HAPPY FOR YOU, ITO. SO VERY HAPPY.
YOU ARE RIGHT. THIS IS A SIGN-- A GOOD SIGN... ONE WE WILL BOTH SHARE IN.
SEVERAL DAYS LATER, AMATEUR ASTRONOMER FURUKAWA'S DISCOVERY IS EXAMINED IN GREAT DEPTH UNDER A GLITTERING CANOPY OF STARS AT CALIFORNIA'S MOUNT PALOMAR OBSERVATORY.

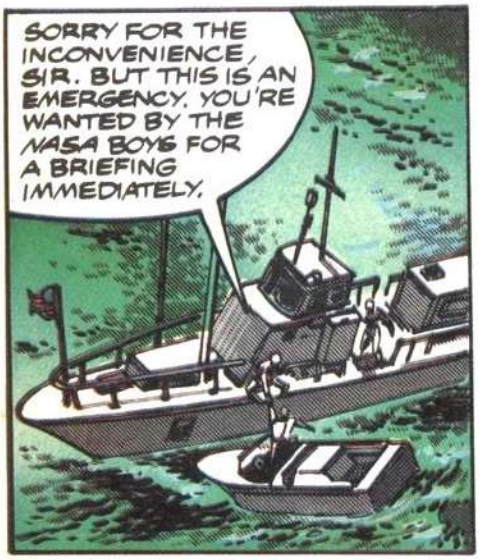

THE MASSIVE DOME SLOWLY REVOLVES INTO A PRESCRIBED POSITION AND SLIDES OPEN LIKE THE SINGLE EYE LID OF SOME JUST AROUSED CYCLOPS..
...TO FOCUS A PIERCING TELESCOPIC LENS ON THE HEAVENS BEYOND...
...IMMEASURABLY AMPLIFYING THE VISION OF THE STAR-GAZING SCIENTIST-- DOCTOR OLIVER WENDELL WILKIE.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT. THAT JAPANESE GENTLEMAN WAS DEFINITELY NOT SEEING FIRECRACKERS WHEN HE TOOK THIS PHOTO.
THE ONLY THI--OH MY LORD!
808-- COME OVER HERE! THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT... QUICKLY.
BE THERE IN A SECOND, DOCTOR.
TAKE A LOOK AT THIS ENLARGEMENT. SEE THAT ANGLE... DO YOU REALIZE WHERE THIS BLAMED THING IS HEADING? DO YOU REALIZE?!
I CATCH YOUR DRIFT, DOCTOR. AND UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES...
...I THINK IT BEST WE GET ON THE HORN TO NASA--
--RIGHT AWAY.
THE FOLLOWING DAY OFF THE COAST OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, THE SALTY AIR IS FILLED WITH THE PROMISE OF VICTORY FOR ANY OF THE HUNDREDS OF ENTRANTS INTO THE AMERICAN CUP RACE.
SEA-WORTHY CRAFTS OF ALL CONFIGURATIONS SKIM THE FOAMING BRINE IN THE HOPE OF CAPTURING THE COVETED TROPHY...
...AND NONE ARE HELMED MORE SKILLFULLY THAN THE SMALL ENTRY CAPTAINED BY--

--ASTROPHYSICIST DOCTOR PAUL BRADLEY, WHO SPARKED AMERICA'S FLEDGLING EFFORT IN SELF-PROTECTION AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL OBJECTS COLLIDING WITH EARTH...

...ONLY TO ANGRILY WALK OFF THE PROJECT WHEN THE MILITARY BEGAN TO SEE IN IT THE CHANCE FOR USE AS STRATEGIC LEVERAGE AGAINST THE RUSSIANS.

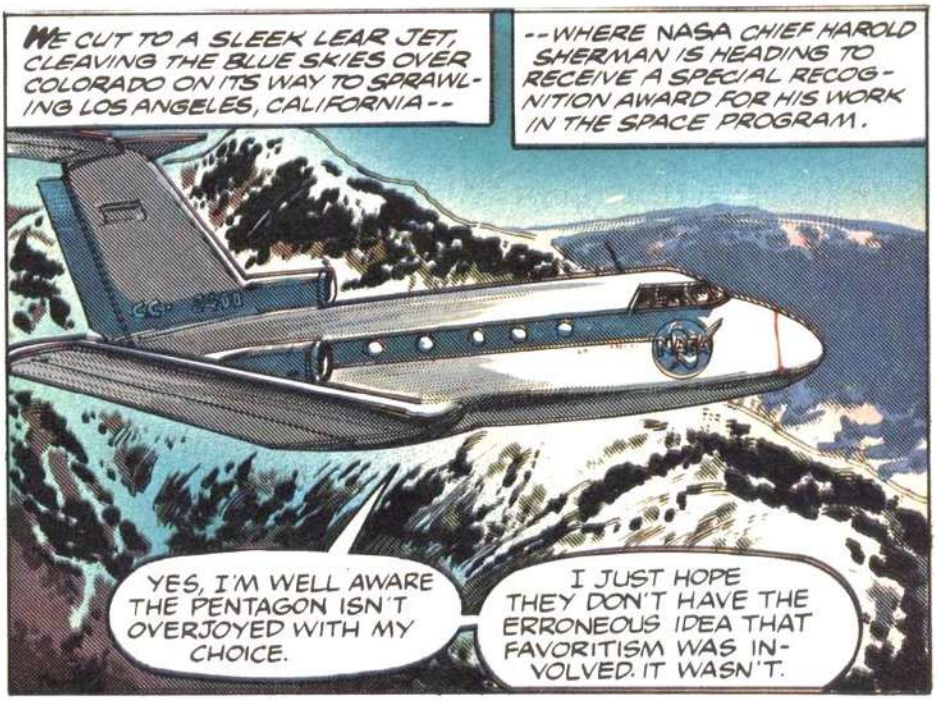




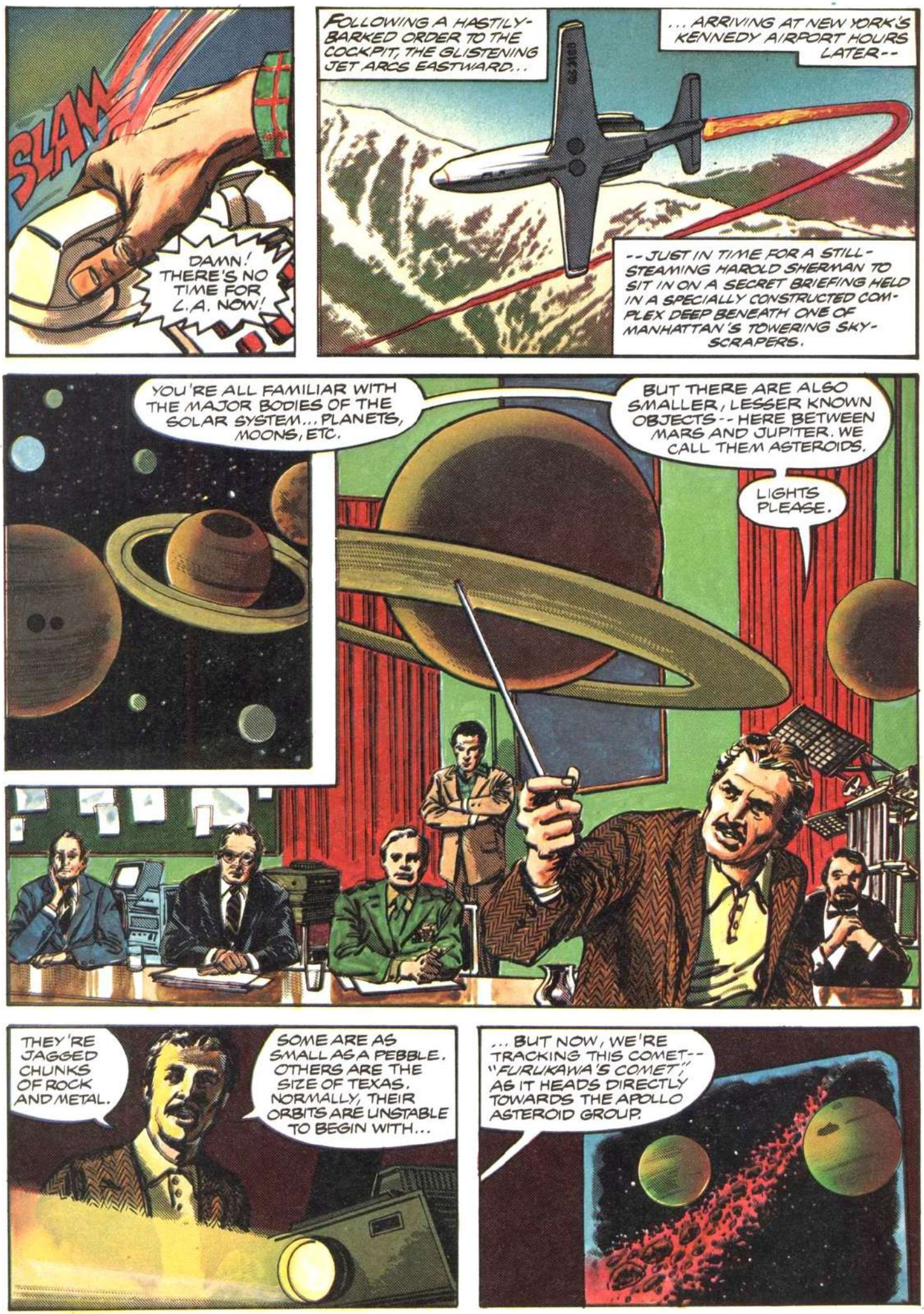
WORDLESSLY, BRADLEY STEPS ABOARD... HIS ANNOYANCE EFFECTIVELY CONVEYED THROUGH HIS SILENCE. THEN, WITH A THROATY ROAR, THE POWERFUL CUTTER SPEEDS OFF.

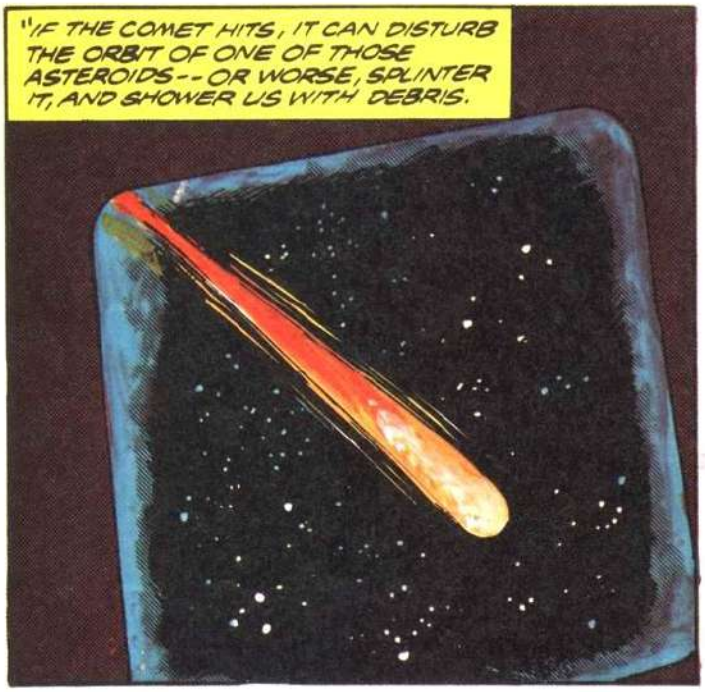
WE CUT TO A SLEEK LEAR JET, CLEAVING THE BLUE SKIES OVER COLORADO ON ITS WAY TO SPRAWLING LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA--

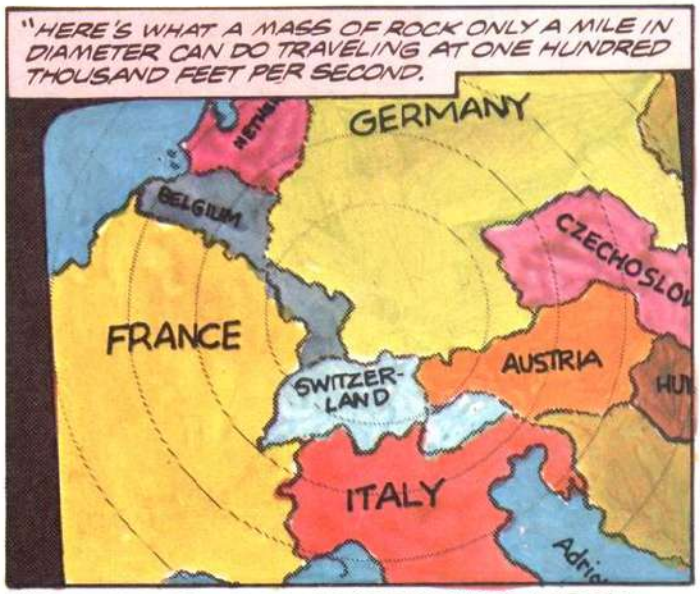
--WHERE NASA CHIEF HAROLD SHERMAN IS HEADING TO RECEIVE A SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD FOR HIS WORK IN THE SPACE PROGRAM.


YES, I'M WELL AWARE THE PENTAGON ISN'T OVERJOYED WITH MY CHOICE.
I JUST HOPE THEY DON'T HAVE THE ERRONEOUS IDEA THAT FAVORITISM WAS INVOLVED. IT WASN'T.

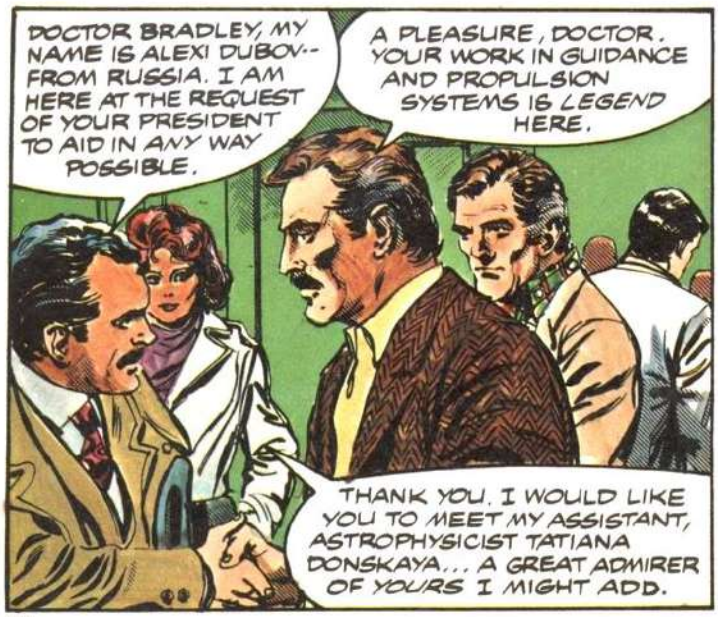
MY FRIENDSHIP WITH PAUL BRADLEY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SELECTING HIM TO HEAD THIS METEOR OPERATION.
I HAPPEN TO THINK HE'S THE ONLY MAN IN AMERICA WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND GUTS TO DEAL WITH THIS CRISIS IN A--
RING


SLAM
DAMN! THERE'S NO TIME FOR L.A. NOW!
FOLLOWING A HASTILY-BARKED ORDER TO THE COCKPIT, THE GLISTENING JET ARCS EASTWARD...
...ARRIVING AT NEW YORK'S KENNEDY AIRPORT HOURS LATER--
--JUST IN TIME FOR A STILL-STEAMING HAROLD SHERMAN TO SIT IN ON A SECRET BRIEFING HELD IN A SPECIALLY CONSTRUCTED COMPLEX DEEP BENEATH ONE OF MANHATTAN'S TOWERING SKY-SCRAPERS.
YOU'RE ALL FAMILIAR WITH THE MAJOR BODIES OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM... PLANETS, MOONS, ETC.
BUT THERE ARE ALSO SMALLER, LESSER KNOWN OBJECTS -- HERE BETWEEN MARS AND JUPITER. WE CALL THEM ASTEROIDS.
LIGHTS PLEASE.
THEY'RE JAGGED CHUNKS OF ROCK AND METAL.
SOME ARE AS SMALL AS A PEBBLE. OTHERS ARE THE SIZE OF TEXAS. NORMALLY, THEIR ORBITS ARE UNSTABLE TO BEGIN WITH...
...BUT NOW, WE'RE TRACKING THIS COMET -- "FURUKAWA'S COMET", AS IT HEADS DIRECTLY TOWARDS THE APOLLO ASTEROID GROUP.


"IF THE COMET HITS, IT CAN DISTURB THE ORBIT OF ONE OF THOSE ASTEROIDS -- OR WORSE, SPLINTER IT, AND SHOWER US WITH DEBRIS.

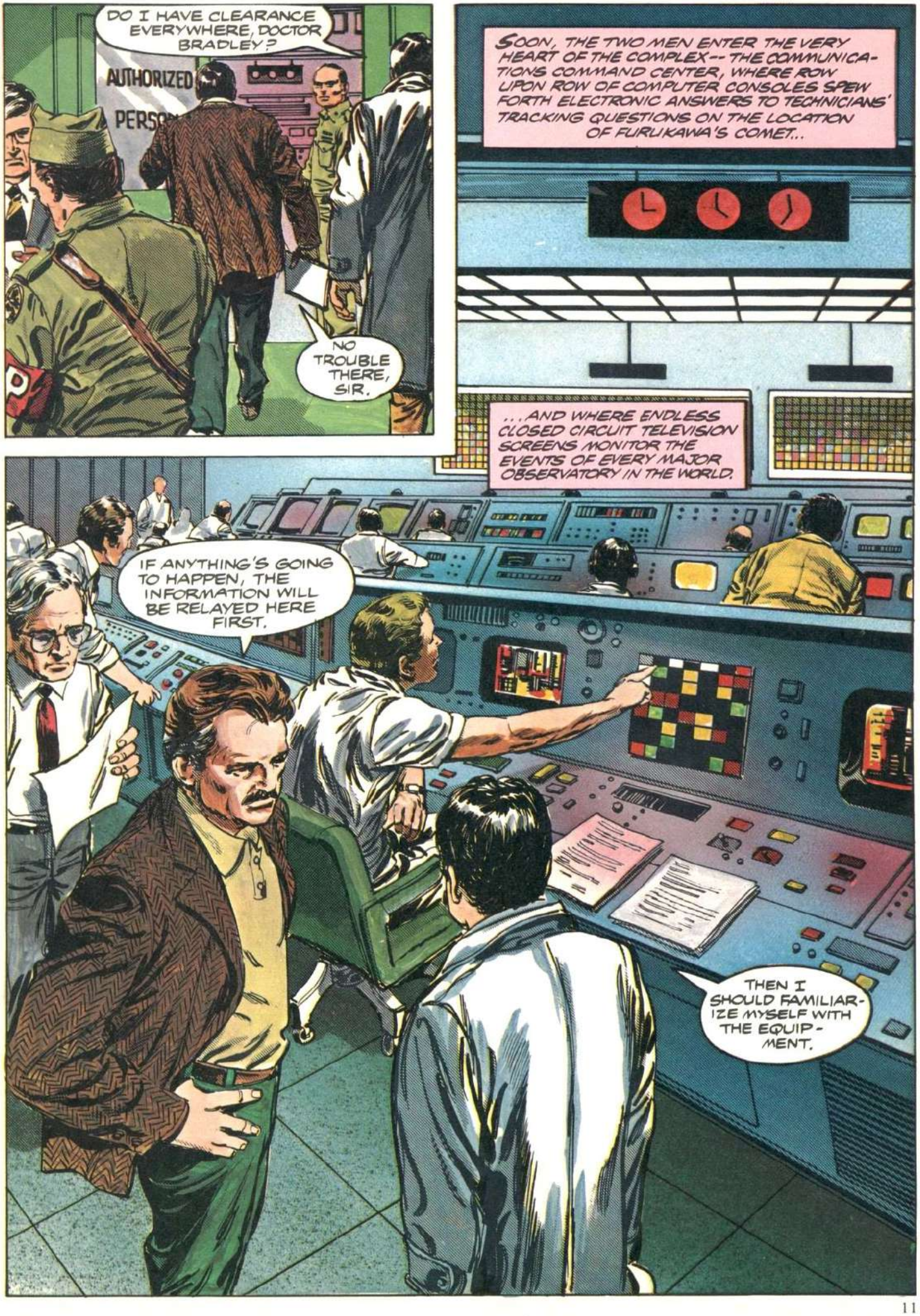

"HERE'S WHAT A MASS OF ROCK ONLY A MILE IN DIAMETER CAN DO TRAVELING AT ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND FEET PER SECOND.
GERMANY
BELGIUM
FRANCE
SWITZER-LAND
AUSTRIA
ITALY
"THE CRATER WOULD BE FIFTY MILES ACROSS. AND THE SURROUNDING AREA FOR OVER SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY MILES WOULD BE REDUCED TO RUBBLE. LIGHTS PLEASE."

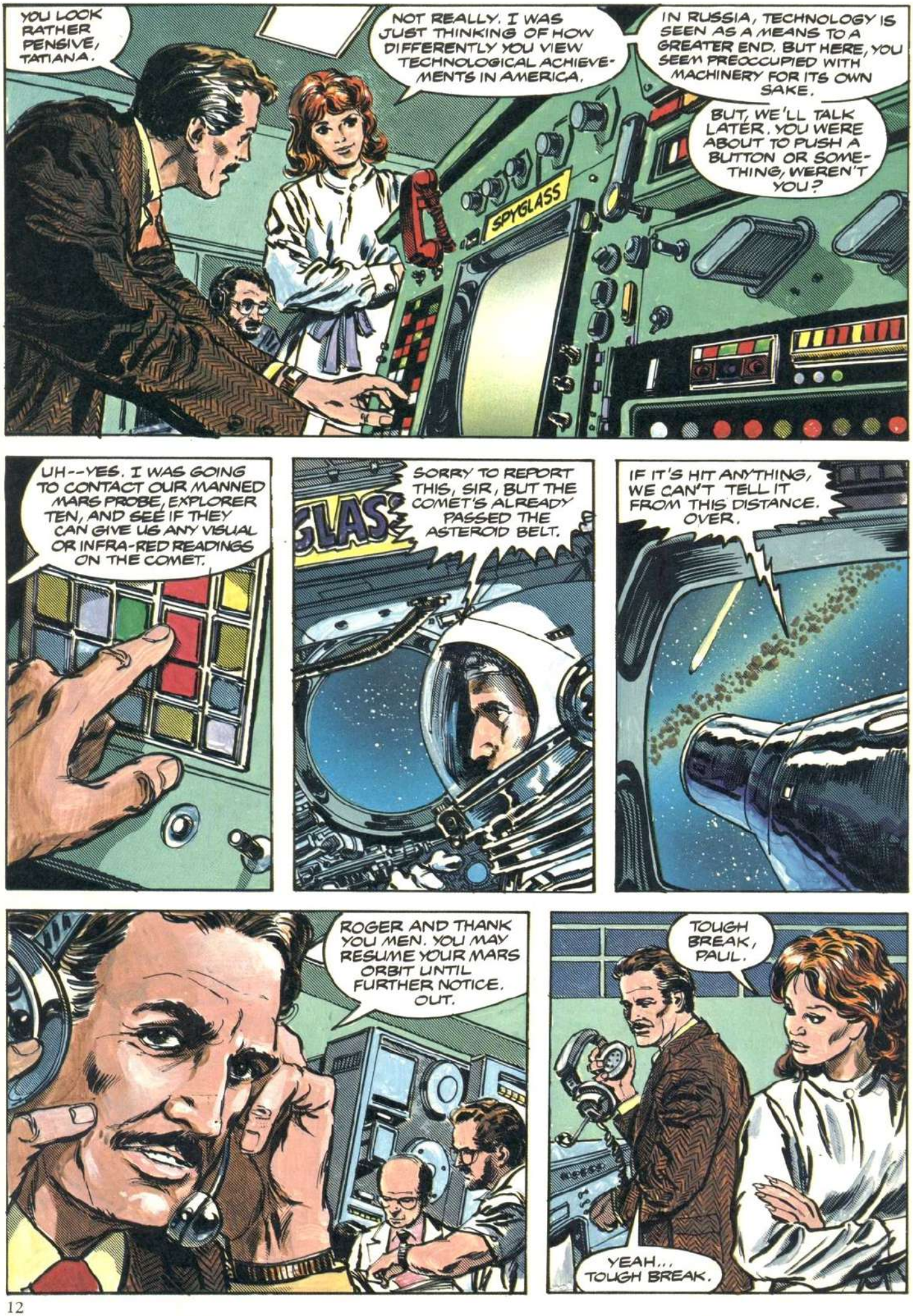
WE'VE DONE OUR HOMEWORK, GENTLEMEN. THERE'S A HIGH PROBABILITY FACTOR THIS COULD HAPPEN.
AND WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THE DEBRIS WILL COME DOWN, WHICH MAKES EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD ON THIS PLANET, POTENTIALLY A SITTING TARGET.
ITALY
THE MEETING CONCLUDES ON THAT TENSE NOTE.


DOCTOR BRADLEY, MY NAME IS ALEXI DUBOV -- FROM RUSSIA. I AM HERE AT THE REQUEST OF YOUR PRESIDENT TO AID IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE.
A PLEASURE, DOCTOR. YOUR WORK IN GUIDANCE AND PROPULSION SYSTEMS IS LEGEND HERE.
THANK YOU. I WOULD LIKE YOU TO MEET MY ASSISTANT, ASTROPHYSICIST TATIANA DONSKAYA... A GREAT ADMIRER OF YOURS I MIGHT ADD.

PLEASE CALL ME TATIANA, WON'T YOU?
FIRST NAMES ARE SO MUCH LESS -- FORMAL.
UMM... SURELY.

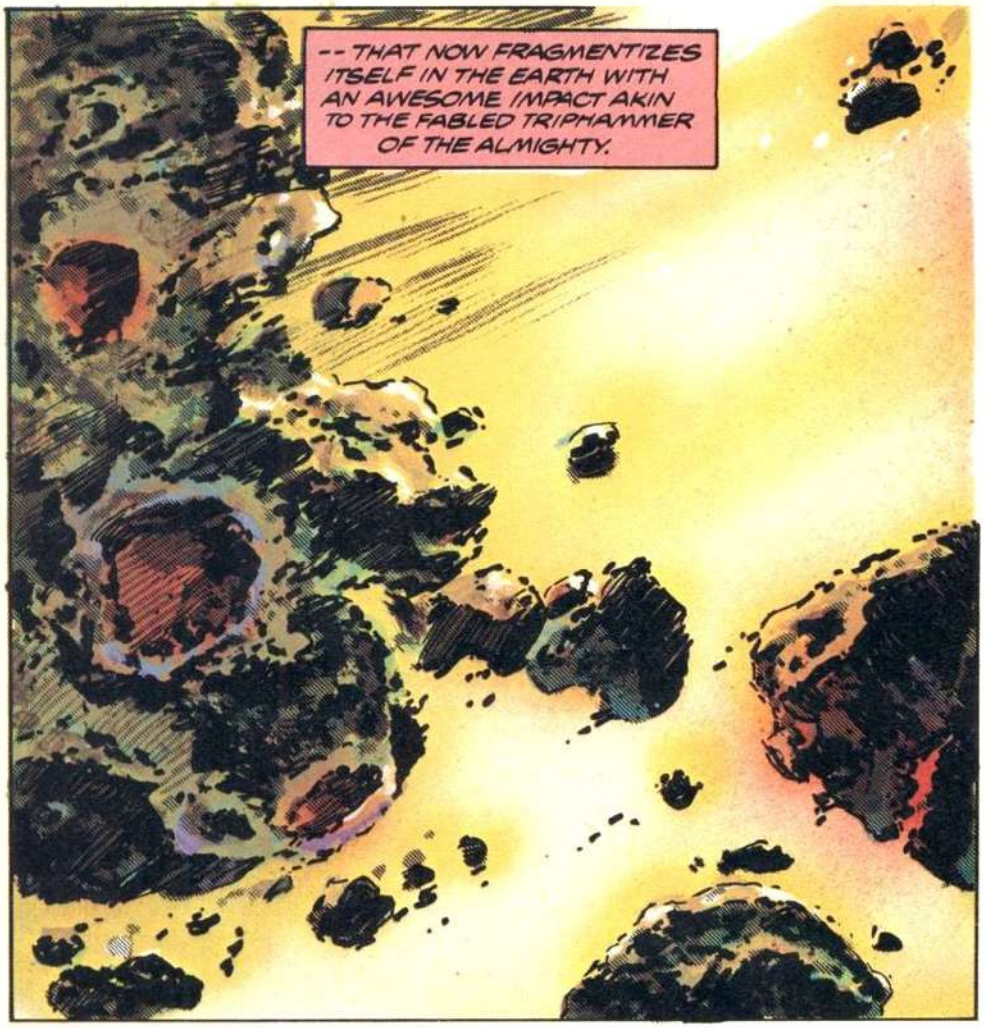
NOW IF YOU'LL BOTH FOLLOW ME.


DO I HAVE CLEARANCE EVERYWHERE, DOCTOR BRADLEY?
AUTHORIZED
PERSO
NO TROUBLE THERE, SIR.
SOON, THE TWO MEN ENTER THE VERY HEART OF THE COMPLEX -- THE COMMUNICATIONS COMMAND CENTER, WHERE ROW UPON ROW OF COMPUTER CONSOLES SPEW FORTH ELECTRONIC ANSWERS TO TECHNICIANS' TRACKING QUESTIONS ON THE LOCATION OF FURUKAWA'S COMET...
...AND WHERE ENDLESS CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION SCREENS MONITOR THE EVENTS OF EVERY MAJOR OBSERVATORY IN THE WORLD.
IF ANYTHING'S GOING TO HAPPEN, THE INFORMATION WILL BE RELAYED HERE FIRST.
THEN I SHOULD FAMILIARIZE MYSELF WITH THE EQUIPMENT.


YOU LOOK RATHER PENSIVE, TATIANA.
NOT REALLY. I WAS JUST THINKING OF HOW DIFFERENTLY YOU VIEW TECHNOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN AMERICA.
IN RUSSIA, TECHNOLOGY IS SEEN AS A MEANS TO A GREATER END. BUT HERE, YOU SEEM PREOCCUPIED WITH MACHINERY FOR ITS OWN SAKE.
BUT, WE'LL TALK LATER. YOU WERE ABOUT TO PUSH A BUTTON OR SOMETHING, WEREN'T YOU?
SPYGLASS
UH--YES. I WAS GOING TO CONTACT OUR MANNED MARS PROBE, EXPLORER TEN, AND SEE IF THEY CAN GIVE US ANY VISUAL OR INFRA-RED READINGS ON THE COMET.
SORRY TO REPORT THIS, SIR, BUT THE COMET'S ALREADY PASSED THE ASTEROID BELT.
IF IT'S HIT ANYTHING, WE CAN'T TELL IT FROM THIS DISTANCE. OVER.
ROGER AND THANK YOU MEN. YOU MAY RESUME YOUR MARS ORBIT UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. OUT.
TOUGH BREAK, PAUL.
YEAH... TOUGH BREAK.

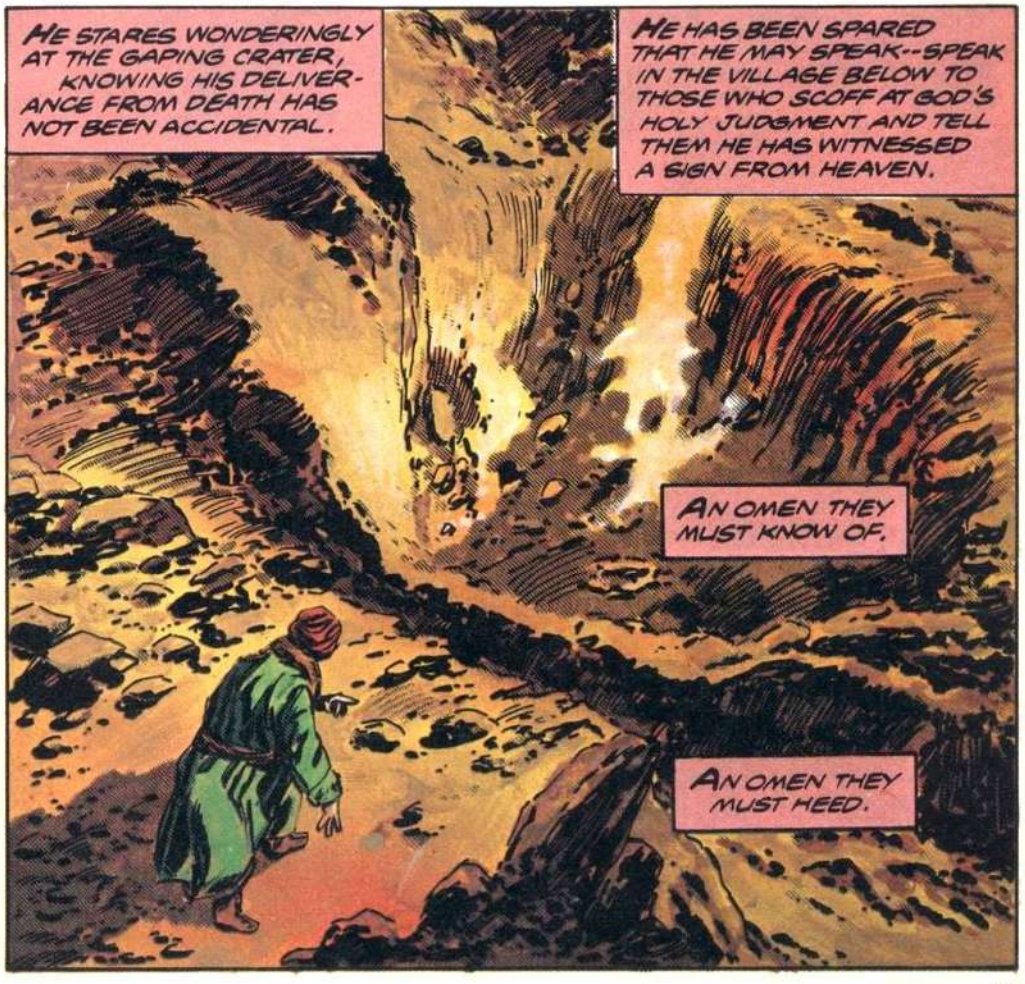
GREENWICH ENGL
MAYBE THIS SIGNAL FROM ENGLAND'S GOOD NEWS.
DOCTOR BRADLEY, WE'VE TRIANGULATED OUR READINGS AND CAN SAY WITH CERTAINTY...
...THE COMET HAS INDEED STRUCK THE ASTEROID BELT, DISLODGING SEVERAL ASTEROIDS NOW HEADING TOWARDS EARTH.
"ALLOWING FOR THE EARTH'S ORBIT AND ROTATION, WITH A TEN PER CENT MARGIN FOR ERROR--
--I ASSUME ONE FRAGMENT WILL HIT IN A MATTER OF HOURS, SOMEWHERE IN ASIA."
THE SIBERIAN PEAKS STRETCH MAJESTICALLY UPWARD WHERE A TIRED MONGOLIAN SHEEPHERDER, AHMAND VOLSTACK, CRANES HIS NECK TO VIEW A GROWING PIN-PRICK OF LIGHT THAT HAS JUST MYSTERIOUSLY APPEARED IN THE SKY ABOVE.
HE RISES SLOWLY, ENTRANCED BY THE MULTI-COLORED DISPLAY OF WHICH HE IS SOLE WITNESS.
IT DWARFS IN MAGNIFICENCE ANY SUNRISE HE HAS SET EYES UPON IN HIS LONG, HARD LIFE.

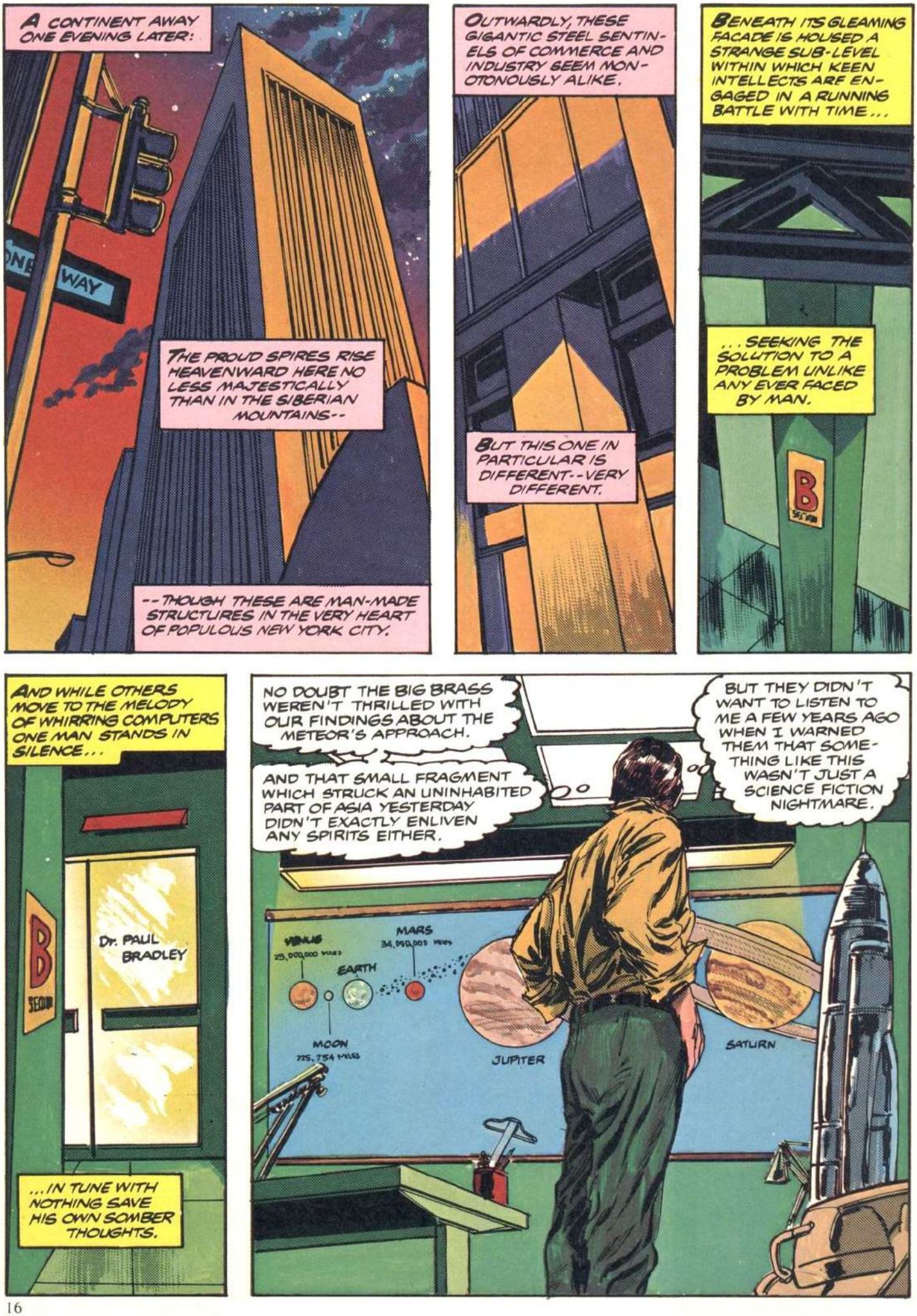
AND THEN, WONDER BECOMES FEAR AS THE BRILLIANCE INTENSIFIES.
THE FAMILIAR LANDSCAPE LOSES ITS SHAPE IN THE NOW BLINDING GLARE.
AHMAND TURNS TO FLEE AS FEAR MELDS INTO MADNESS AND HIS EYES BLAZE WITH INNER FIRES NO LESS INTENSE THAN THE BURNING LIGHT WHICH PURSUES HIM.
WITHIN SECONDS, THE LIGHT IS ALL... ALL-ENVELOPING... ALL-CONSUMING.
YET IT MERELY HERALDS THE APPROACH OF SOMETHING FROM BEYOND.
SOMETHING ALIEN.
SOMETHING WRENCHED FROM THE BLACKNESS OF SPACE--

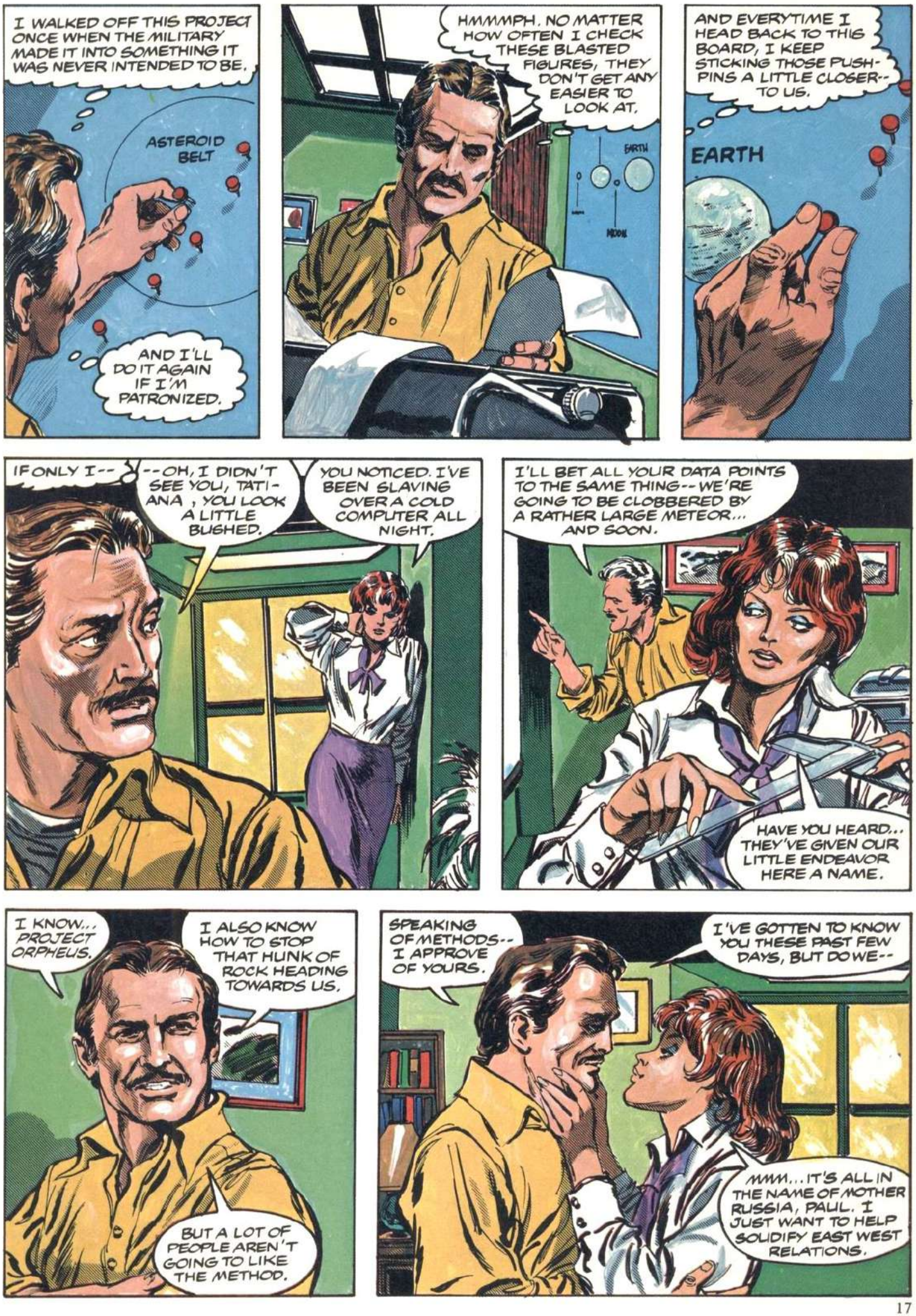

-- THAT NOW FRAGMENTIZES ITSELF IN THE EARTH WITH AN AWESOME IMPACT AKIN TO THE FABLED TRIPHAMMER OF THE ALMIGHTY.

AHMAND FALLS HELPLESSLY TO HIS KNEES, NOT PRAYING --BUT CURSING... CURSING A GOD HE HAS WORSHIPPED SINCE BIRTH... A GOD WHO HAS MADE OF AHMAND A TARGET OF HIS UNFATHOMABLE WRATH.

THEN... SILENCE. AFTER MOMENTS OF CRINGING AGONY, AHMAND RAISES HIS HEAD TO PEER ABOUT HIM.


HE STARES WONDERINGLY AT THE GAPING CRATER, KNOWING HIS DELIVERANCE FROM DEATH HAS NOT BEEN ACCIDENTAL.
HE HAS BEEN SPARED THAT HE MAY SPEAK--SPEAK IN THE VILLAGE BELOW TO THOSE WHO SCOFF AT GOD'S HOLY JUDGMENT AND TELL THEM HE HAS WITNESSED A SIGN FROM HEAVEN.
AN OMEN THEY MUST KNOW OF.
AN OMEN THEY MUST HEED.


A CONTINENT AWAY ONE EVENING LATER:
WAY
THE PROUD SPIRES RISE HEAVENWARD HERE NO LESS MAJESTICALLY THAN IN THE SIBERIAN MOUNTAINS--
--THOUGH THESE ARE MAN-MADE STRUCTURES IN THE VERY HEART OF POPULOUS NEW YORK CITY.
OUTWARDLY, THESE GIGANTIC STEEL SENTINELS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY SEEM MONOTONOUSLY ALIKE.
BUT THIS ONE IN PARTICULAR IS DIFFERENT--VERY DIFFERENT.
BENEATH ITS GLEAMING FACADE IS HOUSED A STRANGE SUB-LEVEL WITHIN WHICH KEEN INTELLECTS ARE ENGAGED IN A RUNNING BATTLE WITH TIME...
...SEEKING THE SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM UNLIKE ANY EVER FACED BY MAN.
B
AND WHILE OTHERS MOVE TO THE MELODY OF WHIRRING COMPUTERS ONE MAN STANDS IN SILENCE...
B
Dr. PAUL BRADLEY
...IN TUNE WITH NOTHING SAVE HIS OWN SOMBER THOUGHTS.
NO DOUBT THE BIG BRASS WEREN'T THRILLED WITH OUR FINDINGS ABOUT THE METEOR'S APPROACH.
AND THAT SMALL FRAGMENT WHICH STRUCK AN UNINHABITED PART OF ASIA YESTERDAY DIDN'T EXACTLY ENLIVEN ANY SPIRITS EITHER.
BUT THEY DIDN'T WANT TO LISTEN TO ME A FEW YEARS AGO WHEN I WARNED THEM THAT SOMETHING LIKE THIS WASN'T JUST A SCIENCE FICTION NIGHTMARE.
VENUS
25,000,000 MILES
EARTH
MARS
34,000,000 MILES
MOON
225,754 MILES
JUPITER
SATURN


I WALKED OFF THIS PROJECT ONCE WHEN THE MILITARY MADE IT INTO SOMETHING IT WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE.
ASTEROID BELT
AND I'LL DO IT AGAIN IF I'M PATRONIZED.
HMMMPH. NO MATTER HOW OFTEN I CHECK THESE BLASTED FIGURES, THEY DON'T GET ANY EASIER TO LOOK AT.
EARTH
MOON
AND EVERYTIME I HEAD BACK TO THIS BOARD, I KEEP STICKING THOSE PUSH-PINS A LITTLE CLOSER-- TO US.
EARTH
IF ONLY I--
--OH, I DIDN'T SEE YOU, TATIANA, YOU LOOK A LITTLE BUSHED.
YOU NOTICED. I'VE BEEN SLAVING OVER A COLD COMPUTER ALL NIGHT.
I'LL BET ALL YOUR DATA POINTS TO THE SAME THING-- WE'RE GOING TO BE CLOBBERED BY A RATHER LARGE METEOR... AND SOON.
HAVE YOU HEARD... THEY'VE GIVEN OUR LITTLE ENDEAVOR HERE A NAME.
I KNOW... PROJECT ORPHEUS.
I ALSO KNOW HOW TO STOP THAT HUNK OF ROCK HEADING TOWARDS US.
BUT A LOT OF PEOPLE AREN'T GOING TO LIKE THE METHOD.
SPEAKING OF METHODS-- I APPROVE OF YOURS.
I'VE GOTTEN TO KNOW YOU THESE PAST FEW DAYS, BUT DO WE--
MMM... IT'S ALL IN THE NAME OF MOTHER RUSSIA, PAUL. I JUST WANT TO HELP SOLIDIFY EAST WEST RELATIONS.

CLICK
CLICK

MORNING.
SO, THAT'S HOW I PROPOSE WE PUT THE ORPHEUS PLAN INTO OPERATION. FRAGMENTS OF THE METEOR ARE ALREADY HEADING OUR WAY, AND COULD HIT ANYTIME.
WE'VE GOT TO BLOW THEM OUT OF THE SKY. THE ONLY WAY TO DO THAT IS WITH NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES.

HOW MUCH MEGATONNAGE IS REQUIRED?
THE EQUIVALENT OF TWO THOUSAND MEGATONS.

EVEN IF WE HAD THE MEGATONNAGE YOU'VE PROPOSED, HOW COULD WE GET IT UP THERE?
IT'S ALREADY THERE, GENERAL ADLON.
I'M REFERRING TO THE NUCLEAR PAYLOADS BOTH WE AND THE SOVIETS ALREADY HAVE ORBITING ABOARD SATELLITES IN OUTER SPACE.

SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, I'M NOT DENYING THE SATELLITE EXISTS. IN FACT, YOU HELPED PUT IT UP THERE YOURSELF.
OF COURSE. BUT IT WAS MY INTENT THAT THOSE MISSILES BE USED FOR WORLD DEFENSE -- AGAINST SOME EXTRATERRESTRIAL THREAT LIKE THIS...
...AND NOT MERELY FOR OUR OWN NATIONAL PROTECTION -- SO WE COULD AIM THEM AT RUSSIA.
OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO COMBINE PAYLOADS -- OURS AND THE SOVIETS' -- RETARGET THEM AWAY FROM EACH OTHER'S CITIES, AND OUT TOWARD SPACE AND THAT ONCOMING METEOR.
THAT'S CRAZY. THE RUSSIANS WOULD NEVER GO ALONG WITH THAT.
WHY NOT? WE'VE HAD MUTUAL COOPERATION IN SPACE BEFORE. AND THE RUSSIANS HAVE AGREED TO REVEAL THEIR SATELLITE'S LOCATION -- PROVIDING WE DO LIKE-WISE.
ATTENTION: A METEOR FRAGMENT HAS BEEN SPOTTED ENTERING EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE. BY CURRENT CALCULATIONS, AND BARRING ENTRY INCINERATION...
...IT WILL STRIKE THE HEART OF THE AUSTRIAN ALPS IN LESS THAN TEN MINUTES. PLEASE CONSULT TELEVISION MONITORS.
HOW MANY OF THOSE THINGS ARE THERE, BRADLEY?
WE DON'T KNOW HOW MANY THE COMET KNOCKED OUT OF THEIR ORBITS, BECAUSE THEY'RE EITHER HIDDEN BY THE SUN, TOO SMALL, OR TOO FAST.

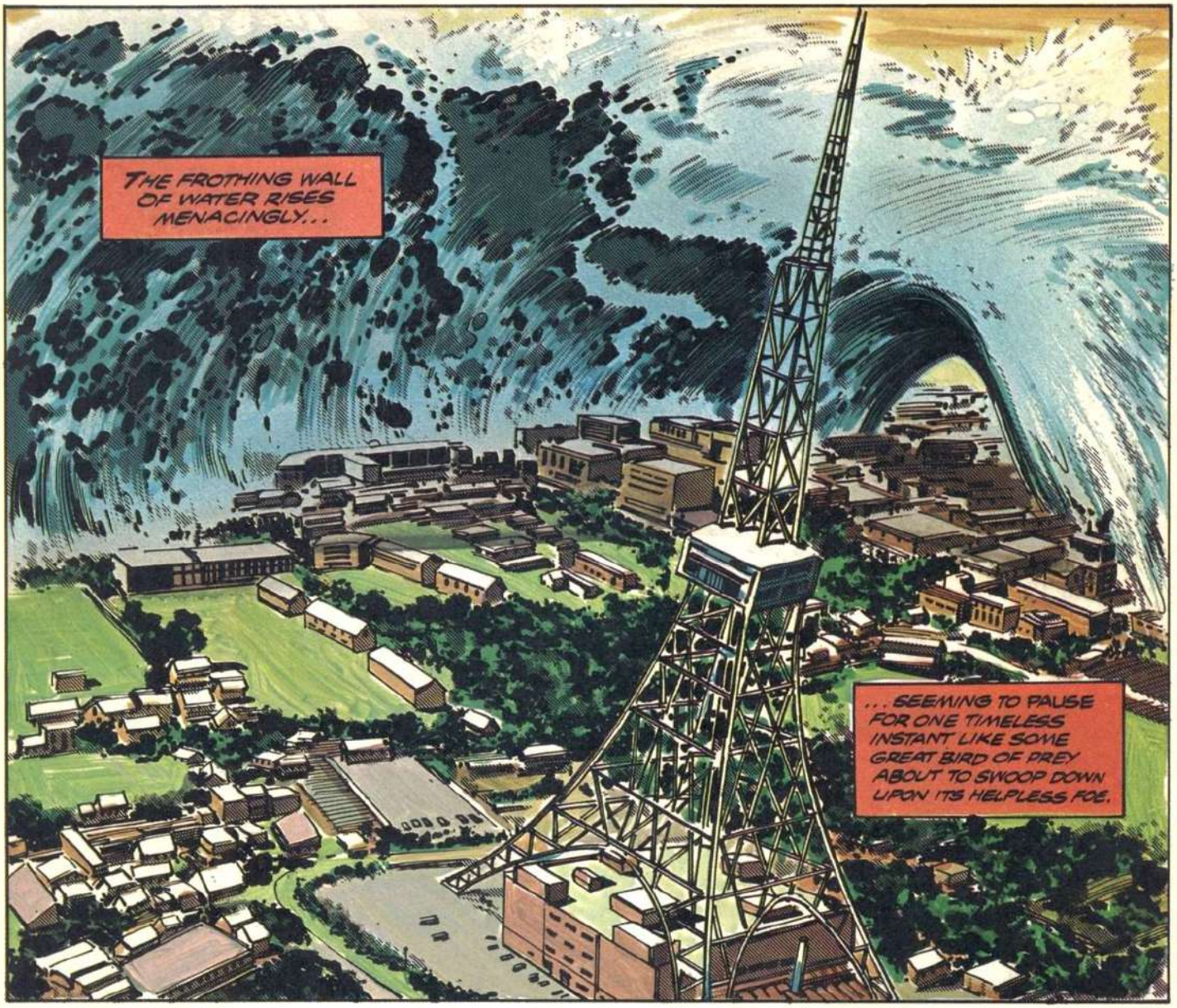
OH LORD! THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE SOME SORT OF SKIING EVENT HAPPENING WHEN THIS THING'S DUE TO HIT.
MAYBE IT'S A FALSE ALARM, DOCTOR BRADLEY. IT'S HAPPENED BEFORE WITH UFOs MANY TIMES.
AMERICAN CAMERAMEN FILM THE ATHLETES' SWIFT, SILENT DESCENT, UNAWARE AS YET, OF THE BRIGHT GLOW BEHIND THEM, RAPIDLY PUNCTUATING THE TWILIGHT SKY...
...AND SOON TO PROVIDE THEM WITH A FAR MORE REMARKABLE EVENT THAN THE ONE THEY NOW COMMIT TO CELLULOID.
A PROCESSION OF TORCH-BEARING SKIERS DOT THE STEEPLY SLOPING TERRAIN, TRAVERSING THE MOUNTAIN WITH GRACEFUL EASE.
THEN...
LOOK AT THAT! I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL IT IS, BUT I WANNA CATCH IT ON FILM!
I'VE GOT A HUNCH THIS LITTLE LIGHT SHOW ISN'T ON THE AGENDA.

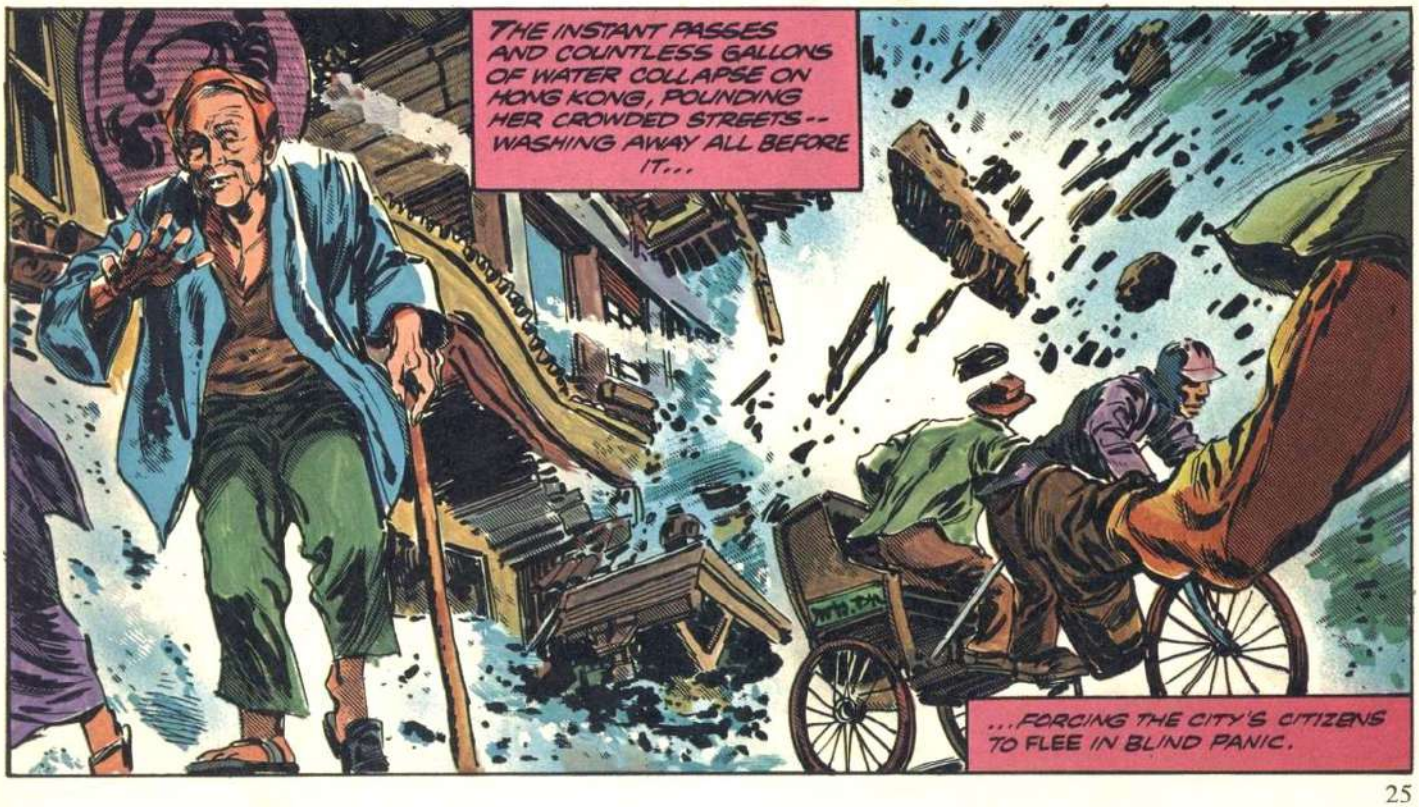
TRAILING A RAINBOW OF EXPLODING GASES BEHIND IT...
...THE POCK-MARKED MONSTROSITY BURSTS INTO THE SIGHT OF THE GAPING CAMERAMEN.
THE FRAGMENT SLIPS FROM VIEW, STRIKING THE FAR SIDE OF THE ALP WITH A VIOLENT DEAFENING CONCUSSION.
LIKE SOME SLEEPING GIANT RUDELY AWAKENED, THE MOUNTAIN SEEMS TO SHUDDER IN ELEMENTAL ANGER.
HUGE CRACKS APPEAR IN THE SNOWS AS THEY SPLIT APART. SHELVES OF ROCK LOOSENED BY THE STAGGERING IMPACT BREAK AWAY...
KRAK!!
...GENERATING THE MOST DREADED OCCURRENCE IMAGINABLE IN THIS SNOW-CAPPED SECTION OF THE WORLD:
AVALANCHE!

SHEETS OF ROCK AND SNOW CASCADE DOWNWARD, AS THE DOOMED SKIERS STARE IN TRANS-FIXED HORROR AT THE UNSTOPPABLE OBJECTS OF THEIR EXTINCTION.
THEIR FINAL SCREAMS ARE INTERMIXED WITH THE ROAR OF THE HURTLING DEBRIS.
INNSBRUCK ITSELF WILL NOT BE SPARED.
ALMOST HUNGRILY, THE THUNDERING CHUNKS CONSUME THE DEFIANT LITTLE CITY WHICH HAS STOOD HERE SO LONG, UNTOUCHED.
THOSE FEW WHO ESCAPE WILL MOURN THE LOSS OF THEIR HOMES AND FAMILIES...
...BURIED FOREVER BENEATH A BLOOD-STAINED SHROUD OF SPARKLING SNOW.

AT THE OTHER END OF THE TRAGIC TRANSMISSION A LONE TELEVISION SCREEN BLANKS OUT.
IN TECHNICIANS' JARGON, IT'S REFERRED TO AS AN EXCESS OF...SNOW.
I-I DON'T BELIEVE IT.
THAT WAS JUST A SMALL FRAGMENT, GENTLEMEN, YET HUNDREDS, PERHAPS THOUSANDS OF LIVES WERE LOST. WE HAVE NO CHOICE. THOSE MISSILES MUST BE USED.
EXCUSE ME.
RRING
YES, MISTER PRESIDENT, WE ALL SAW IT... I UNDERSTAND.
I HAVE FULL AUTHORITY TO DO WHATEVER'S NECESSARY TO STOP THIS THING. THANK YOU, SIR.
THE PRESIDENT'S CONVINCED, HARRY. HE'S GIVEN ME THE GREEN LIGHT.
AND THAT MEANS WE CUT THROUGH THE RED TAPE AND GET THE ORPHEUS PLAN OPERATIONAL.
PARDON ME, DOCTOR. BUT I THINK YOU'LL BE INTERESTED IN WHAT WE'VE GOT ON THE SCREEN FROM JAPAN.

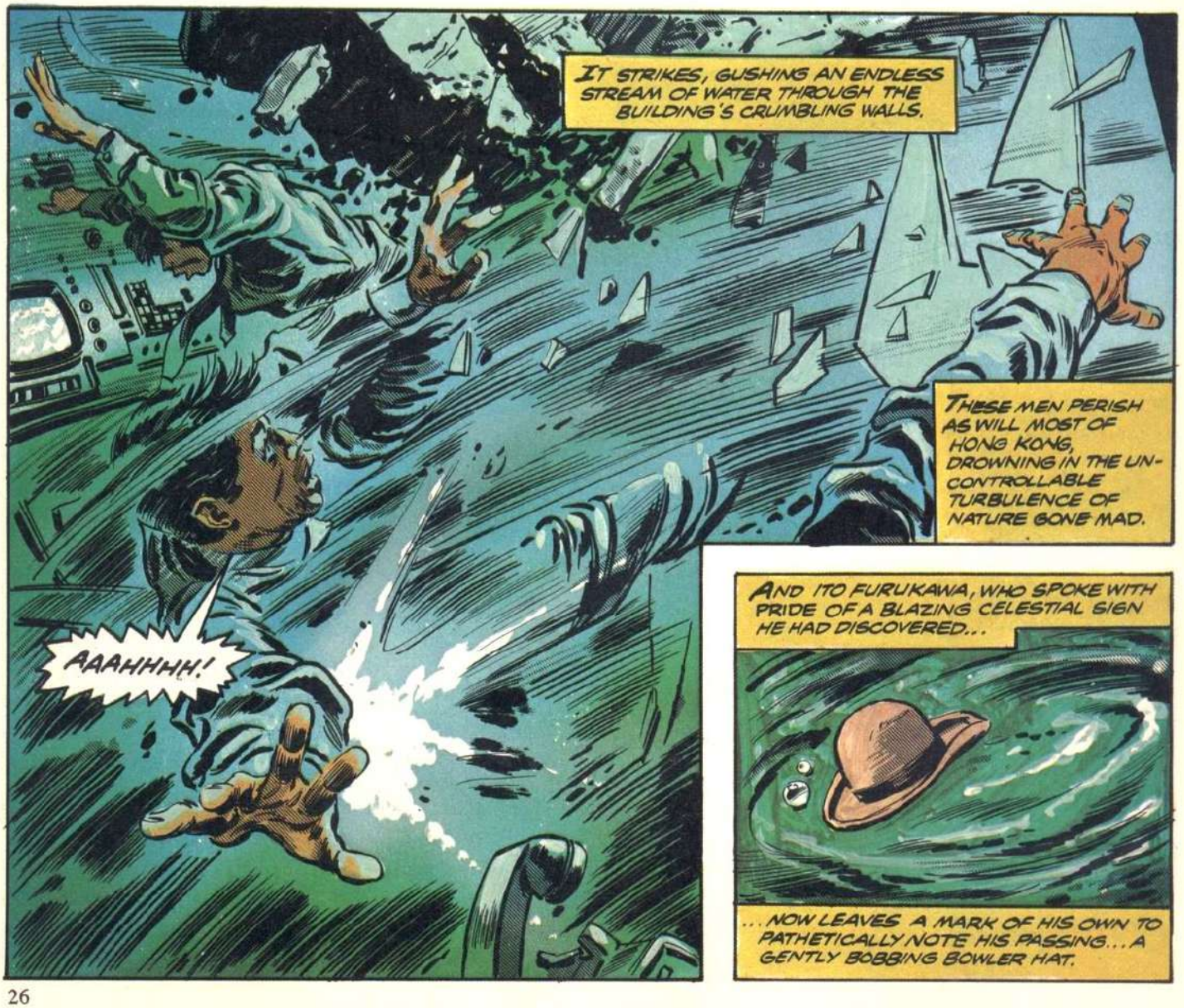
THERE'S A TRANSMISSION COMING IN FROM DOCTOR YAMAMOTO.
TOKYO
WE HAVE JUST RECEIVED WORD FROM A PASSENGER JET. THEY ARE UNABLE TO LAND AT MIDWAY AIRPORT. MIDWAY IS NO LONGER THERE.
"APPARENTLY A METEOR FRAGMENT HAS STRUCK THE MID-PACIFIC OCEAN. THE AIRCRAFT REPORTS A TIDAL WAVE WELL OVER ONE HUNDRED FEET IN HEIGHT--
"BEARING NORTH-NORTHEAST, SEVENTEEN DEGREES FROM MIDWAY...
"...HEADING TOWARD US."


THE FROTHING WALL OF WATER RISES MENACINGLY...
...SEEMING TO PAUSE FOR ONE TIMELESS INSTANT LIKE SOME GREAT BIRD OF PREY ABOUT TO SWOOP DOWN UPON ITS HELPLESS FOE.

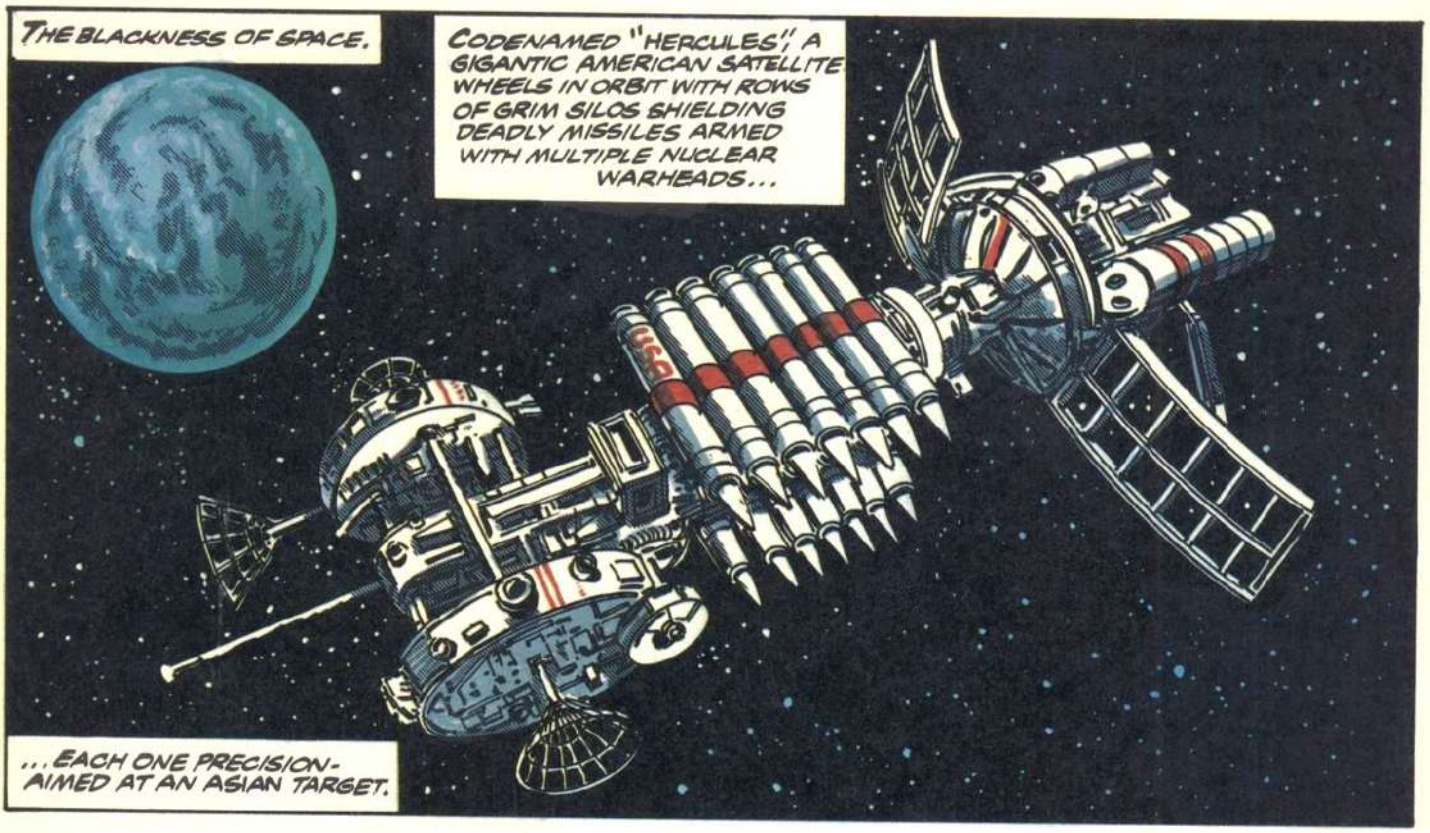

THE INSTANT PASSES AND COUNTLESS GALLONS OF WATER COLLAPSE ON HONG KONG, POUNDING HER CROWDED STREETS -- WASHING AWAY ALL BEFORE IT...
...FORCING THE CITY'S CITIZENS TO FLEE IN BLIND PANIC.

BUT MINDLESS STAMPEDING PROVES FRUITLESS. THE CATASTROPHE HAS COME TOO SWIFTLY FOR EVEN THE SLIGHTEST EVACUATION MEASURES TO BE INITIATED.
LOST IN THE CROWD, AMATEUR ASTRONOMER ITO FURUKAWA AND HIS WIFE SPEND THEIR LAST MOMENTS OF LIFE IN FUTILE FLIGHT --

--WHILE THIRTY-FIVE STORIES ABOVE IN THE HONG KONG COMMAND CENTER FOR PROJECT ORPHEUS...
...NORMALLY PLACID TECHNICIANS STAND AGAPE AT THE MOUNTAINOUS SWELL THAT SURGES NEARER.


IT STRIKES, GUSHING AN ENDLESS STREAM OF WATER THROUGH THE BUILDING'S CRUMBLING WALLS.
THESE MEN PERISH AS WILL MOST OF HONG KONG, DROWNING IN THE UNCONTROLLABLE TURBULENCE OF NATURE GONE MAD.
AAAHHHH!
AND ITO FURUKAWA, WHO SPOKE WITH PRIDE OF A BLAZING CELESTIAL SIGN HE HAD DISCOVERED...
...NOW LEAVES A MARK OF HIS OWN TO PATHETICALLY NOTE HIS PASSING... A GENTLY BOBBING BOWLER HAT.

THE SCREEN GOES DEAD IN MANHATTAN.
THE SITUATION IS GRAVE MY FRIEND.
THOUGH AT LEAST WE STAND TOGETHER AT THIS TRAGIC MOMENT.
AND IT TOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO BRING US TOGETHER. THAT'S THE SHAME OF IT ALL.
INDEED. LET US HOPE THERE IS STILL TIME TO PREVENT FURTHER DISASTER.
I MUST CONTACT MY PEOPLE, FOR THEY HAVE RECEIVED INFORMATION VITAL TO OUR JOINT EFFORT.
MOSCOW
KLIK
COMRADE DUBOV, THE LATEST TRACKING DATA INDICATES THAT THE MAJOR FRAGMENT HEADING FOR EARTH--
--IS NOT EIGHT HUNDRED FEET IN DIAMETER AS PREVIOUSLY POSITED...
...BUT SIXTEEN THOUSAND FEET IN DIAMETER. NO POINT OF IMPACT HAS BEEN DETERMINED YET, BECAUSE WE HAVE JUST BEGUN TRACKING.
SIXTEEN THOUSAND FEET...THAT'S ALMOST THREE MILES, DOCTOR BRADELY.
WE HAVEN'T A MOMENT TO WASTE.


THE BLACKNESS OF SPACE.
CODENAMED "HERCULES," A GIGANTIC AMERICAN SATELLITE WHEELS IN ORBIT WITH ROWS OF GRIM SILOS SHIELDING DEADLY MISSILES ARMED WITH MULTIPLE NUCLEAR WARHEADS...
...EACH ONE PRECISION-AIMED AT AN ASIAN TARGET.

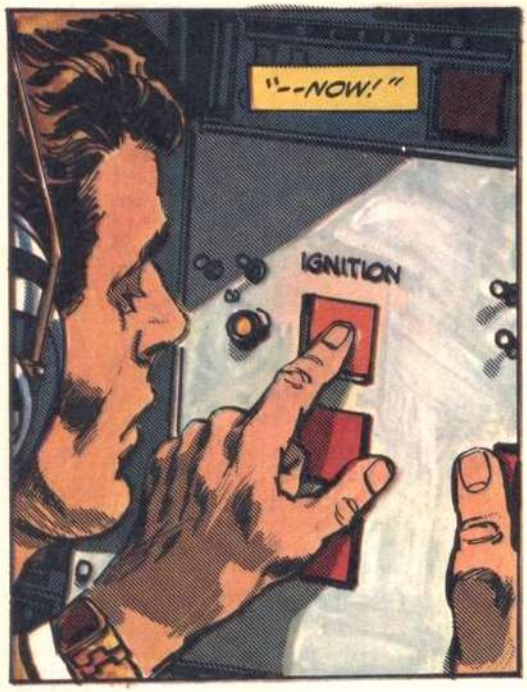
IT'S NO LESS SOPHISTICATED RUSSIAN COUNTERPART PINPOINTS DOZENS OF NORTH AMERICAN LOCATIONS TO RAIN SHAFTS OF ARMAGEDDON UPON, SHOULD TINY CIRCUITS BE ACTIVATED.

HUNDREDS OF MILES BELOW, TWO MEN LABOR OVER TWIN CONSOLES--

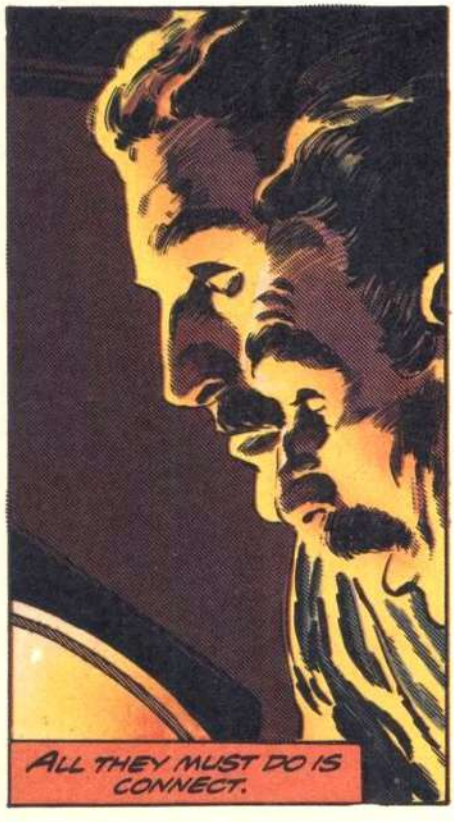
--HOPING TO ALTER THE ALIGNMENT OF BOTH SATELLITES, "DRAWING THEM CLOSER TOGETHER, WHILE SHIFTING THE MISSILES' GAZE OF DEATH OUT TOWARD SPACE...
...AND THE HURTLING METEOR THAT MOVES EVER CLOSER, EVER FASTER --TOWARDS EARTH.

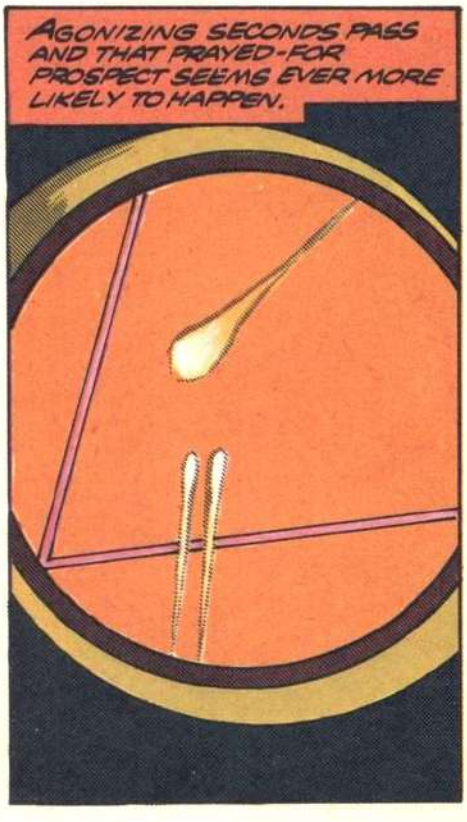
NIGHT HAS FALLEN WHEN PAUL BRADLEY AND ALEXI DUBOV EMERGE FROM THE UNDERGROUND COMMAND CENTER TO BOARD AIR FORCE ONE AT KENNEDY AIRPORT AND CONFER WITH AN ANXIOUS CHIEF EXECUTIVE.
THIS IS AN HONOR, MISTER PRESIDENT.
THE HONOR IS MINE, DOCTOR BRADLEY.
I UNDERSTAND MISSILE REDEPLOYMENT HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND WE NOW PLAY A WAITING GAME UNTIL THE METEOR COMES WITHIN RANGE--
BRRRRIING!
--OH, EXCUSE ME.
HE'S RIGHT HERE. IT'S THE COMMAND CENTER, DOCTOR.
YES-- YOU'RE CERTAIN, I--I SEE, THANK YOU.
BAD NEWS.
"THERE'S A SMALLER CHUNK COMING DOWN THAT'S ESCAPED RADAR NOTICE UNTIL NOW BECAUSE IT'S DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE LARGER FRAGMENT.
"ALL DATA INDICATES IF IT ISN'T STOPPED-- IT'LL LAND A FEW HOURS FROM NOW...
"... RIGHT SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF MANHATTAN."
GOLDEN RAYS OF DAWN GLINT OFF NEW YORK'S FABLED SKYLINE AS A NEW DAY BEGINS...
...BEARING NO HINT OF THE TRAGEDY TO COME.
GORDON

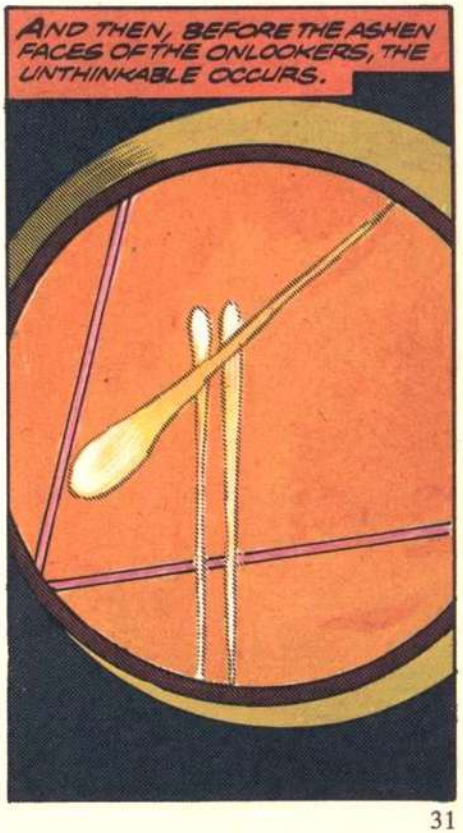
THE SOUNDS OF A GREAT CITY AWAKENING:
THE CLANGING OF GARBAGE PAILS ALONG FASHIONABLE 57TH STREET...
...THE SCRAPING OF CANINE CLAWS ALONG POSH PARK AVENUE.
BUT THERE ARE OTHER SOUNDS WHICH NEVER REACH STREET LEVEL--
--COMING FROM A SEQUESTERED COMPLEX MANY FEET BENEATH THIS GLEAMING SUPER-STRUCTURE.
HERE, A HANDFUL OF NERVOUS MEN AND WOMEN WORK FEVERISHLY TO ENSURE THAT THE BRIGHT DAWN ABOVE--
RADAR TRACKING ROO
--WILL NOT BE THE LAST ONE NEW YORK CITY WILL EVER KNOW.
RADAR SAYS THE FRAGMENT'S RIGHT ON SCHEDULE, SIR.
THEN LAUNCH THOSE BIRDIES, SON--


"--NOW!"
IGNITION

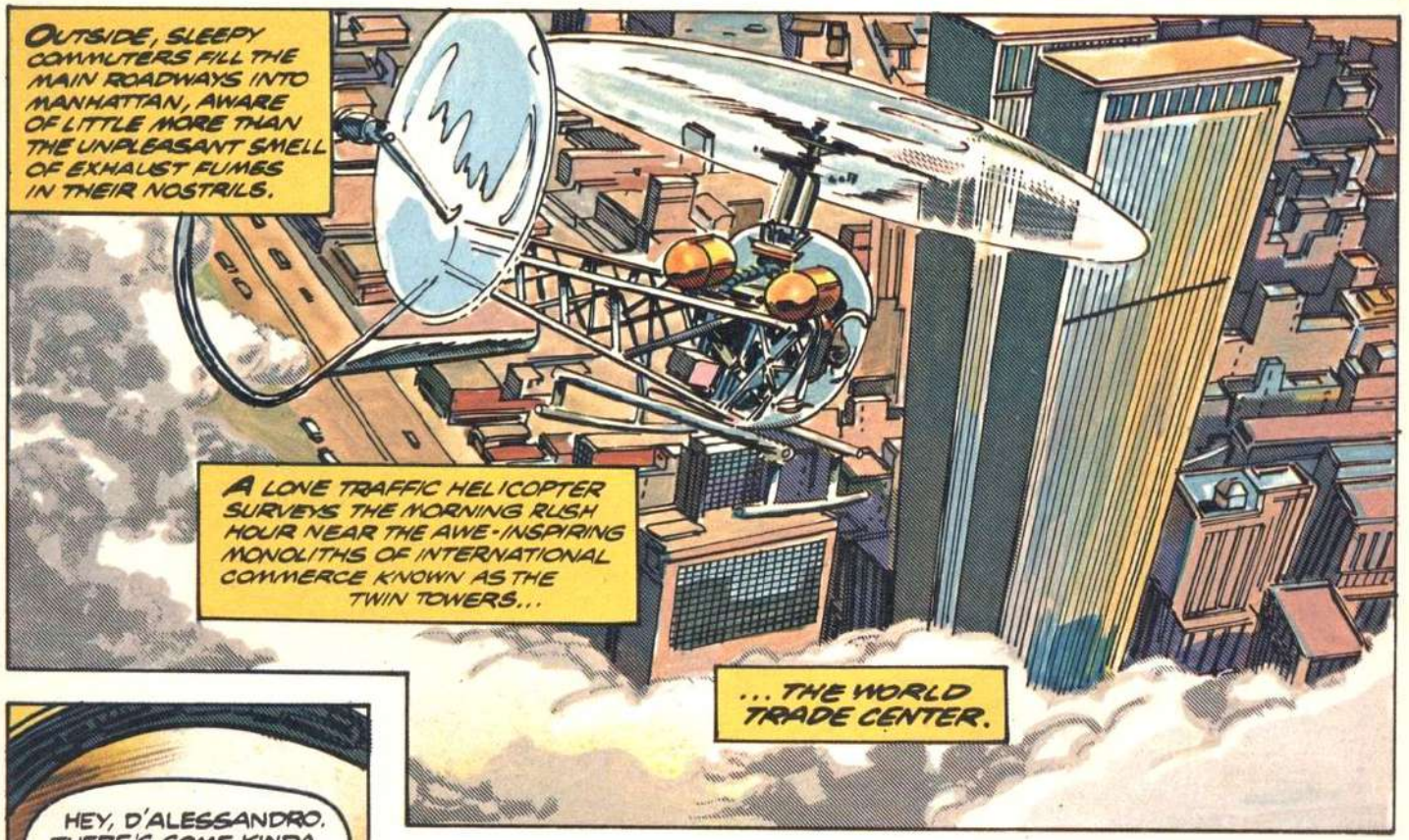
MERELY TWO NUCLEAR-TIPPED PROJECTILES STREAK FROM THE HERCULES SILO, YET, TOGETHER THEY POSSESS ALL THE EXPLOSIVE FIREPOWER NECESSARY TO LITERALLY DISINTEGRATE THE DEADLY METEORITE.


ALL THEY MUST DO IS CONNECT.


AGONIZING SECONDS PASS AND THAT PRAYED-FOR PROSPECT SEEMS EVER MORE LIKELY TO HAPPEN.


AND THEN, BEFORE THE ASHEN FACES OF THE ONLOOKERS, THE UNTHINKABLE OCCURS.

TH-THEY DIDN'T HIT IT. THE FRAGMENT GOT BY. WE'RE FINISHED.
WE STILL HAVE TO RE-ALIGN THE MISSILES TO BLAST THE LARGER FRAGMENT--ORPHEUS ITSELF. START THE COUNTDOWN OR WE WON'T MAKE IT.

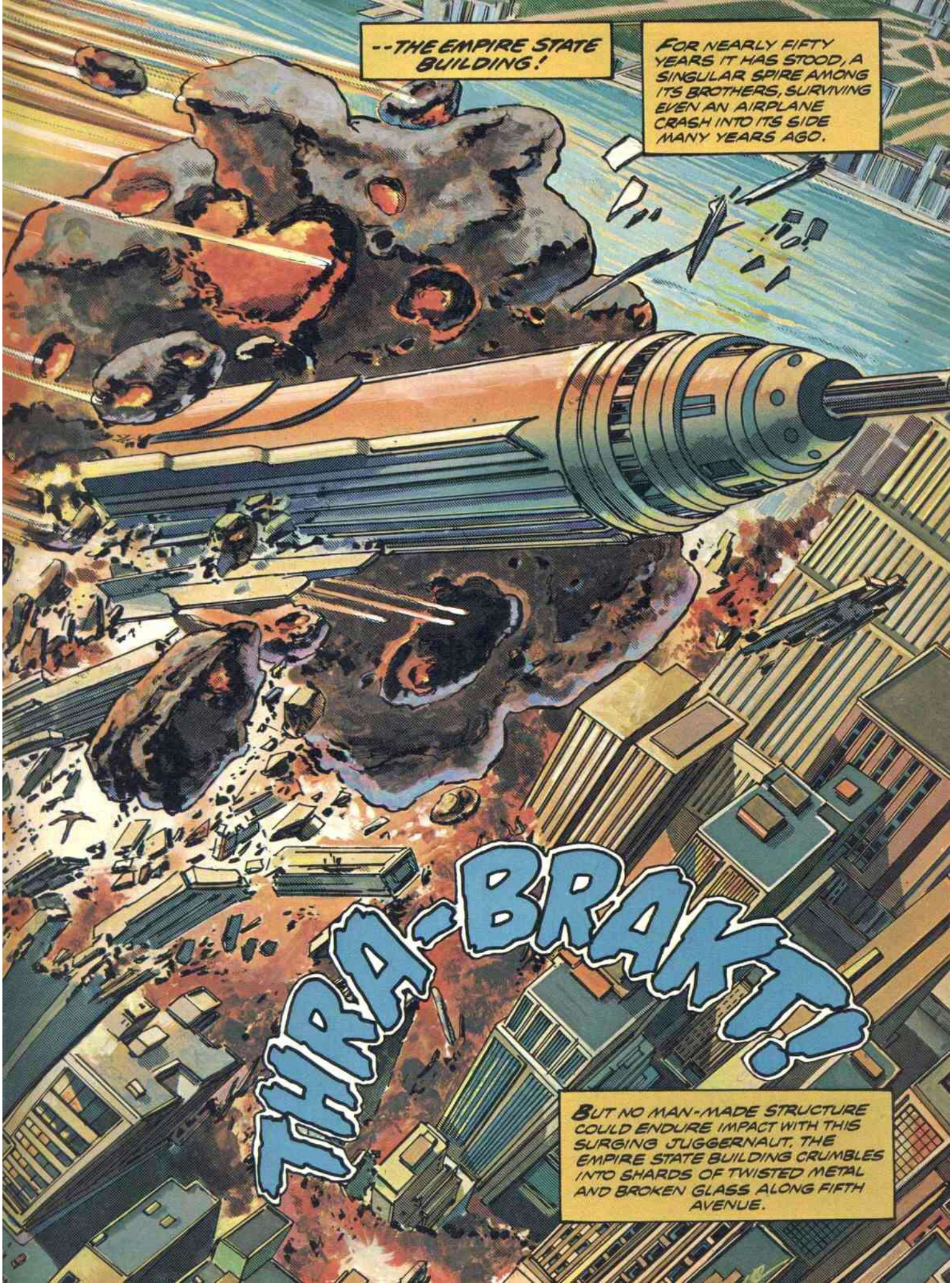

OUTSIDE, SLEEPY COMMUTERS FILL THE MAIN ROADWAYS INTO MANHATTAN, AWARE OF LITTLE MORE THAN THE UNPLEASANT SMELL OF EXHAUST FUMES IN THEIR NOSTRILS.
A LONE TRAFFIC HELICOPTER SURVEYS THE MORNING RUSH HOUR NEAR THE AWE-INSPIRING MONOLITHS OF INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE KNOWN AS THE TWIN TOWERS...
...THE WORLD TRADE CENTER.

HEY, D'ALESSANDRO. THERE'S SOME KINDA CRAZY LIGHT COMIN' FROM NOWHERE!
I SEE IT, PECILE!

WHAT'S THAT? IT'S COMING RIGHT OUTTA THE SKY!
WHAT IS IT?!!
D'ALESSANDRO WILL NEVER RECEIVE AN ANSWER TO HIS FRENZIED QUERY.

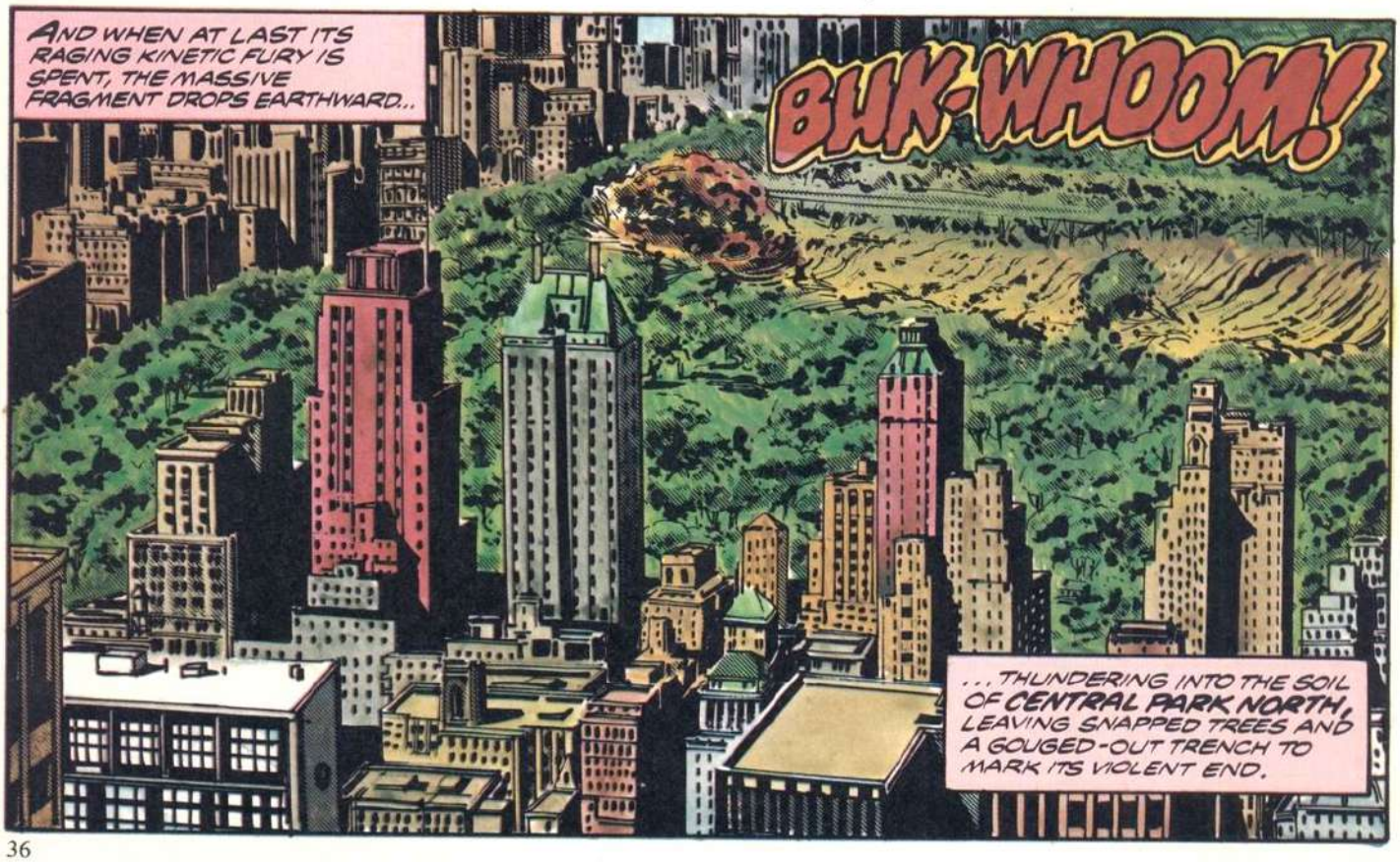
HE DIES SEVEN SECONDS LATER--
SKRA-KOOM!
--AS DO THE TWIN TOWERS THEMSELVES. THEIR TOP FIFTY FLOORS ARE SHEARED OFF AS IF MADE OF NOTHING MORE STURDY THAN PAPER MACHE.
AND AS THESE MIRROR IMAGE MARVELS OF THE ENGINEERING WORLD GIVE WAY BEFORE THE WRATH OF THIS UNLIVING FIEND, PANIC SWEEPS THE HELPLESS CITY AS IT DID INNSBRUCK AND HONG KONG DAYS AGO.

LIKE A SENTIENT, DEMONIC FORCE, THE MASSIVE HULK OF SPACE-BORN ROCK ROARS UPTOWN--
--MERCIFULLY PASSING OVER THE SMALLER BUILDINGS THAT LIE IN ITS PATH... THOUGH DEMOLISHING PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS SKY-SCRAPER IN THE WORLD--


--THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING!
FOR NEARLY FIFTY YEARS IT HAS STOOD, A SINGULAR SPIRE AMONG ITS BROTHERS, SURVIVING EVEN AN AIRPLANE CRASH INTO ITS SIDE MANY YEARS AGO.
THRA-BRAK!!
BUT NO MAN-MADE STRUCTURE COULD ENDURE IMPACT WITH THIS SURGING JUGGERNAUT. THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING CRUMBLES INTO SHARDS OF TWISTED METAL AND BROKEN GLASS ALONG FIFTH AVENUE.

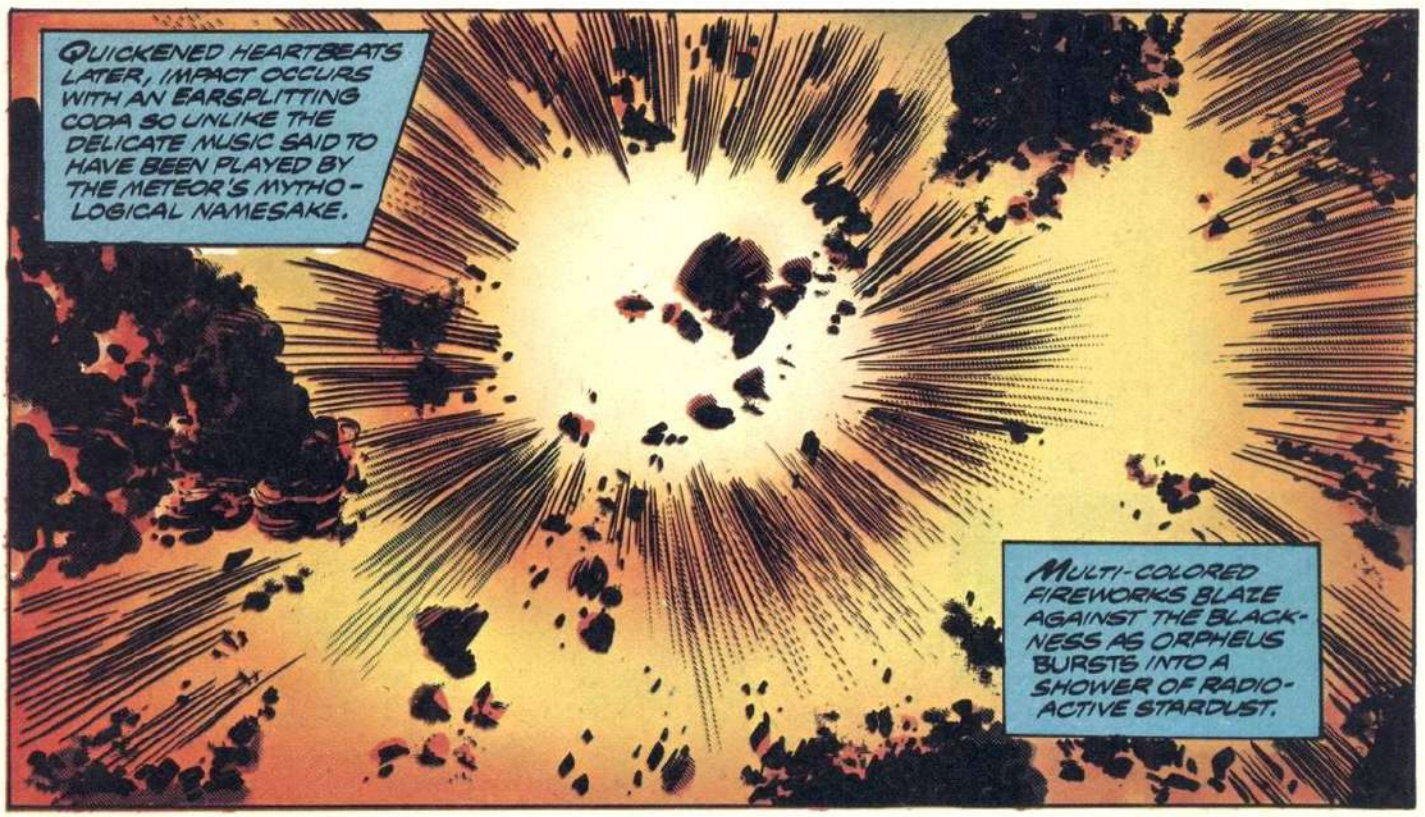
CRASHT!
ROCKEFELLER CENTER BECOMES A MAKESHIFT DUMP FOR THE REMAINS OF THE RCA BUILDING--

--AS THE ONRUSHING CHUNK SHOWERS THE SHOCKED POPULACE WITH MOUNDS OF DEADLY DEBRIS.


AND WHEN AT LAST ITS RAGING KINETIC FURY IS SPENT, THE MASSIVE FRAGMENT DROPS EARTHWARD...
BHK-WHOOM!
...THUNDERING INTO THE SOIL OF CENTRAL PARK NORTH, LEAVING SNAPPED TREES AND A GOUGED-OUT TRENCH TO MARK ITS VIOLENT END.

THE INTENSE TREMORS OF THAT MASSIVE CONCUSSION SHAKE MANHATTAN ISLE TO ITS CORE, SPREADING UNDERGROUND -- EVEN TO THE RECESSES OF THE ORPHEUS COMMAND CENTER.
BLAST IT! THE WALLS ARE COLLAPSING, LETTING IN MUD AND WATER FROM THE SUBWAY TUNNEL WE BUILT THE COMPLEX NEXT TO!
WH--WHAT IS HAPPENING?!
THE GENERATOR'S OUT! I'VE HAD TO SWITCH TO BATTERY POWER. WE'VE GOT TO CONTINUE THE COUNTDOWN --
--ORPHEUS IS STILL COMING!
THE SATELLITES ARE NOW ALIGNED. I AM STARTING THE FIRING SEQUENCE, DOCTOR BRADLEY.
IGNITION
1
DO IT QUICKLY, MAN!
IN SPACE, DOZENS OF LETHAL MISSILES -- OF AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN DESIGN, STREAM FROM THEIR OPENED PODS, THRUST FORWARD ON BLINDING TONGUES OF FLAME... SEEKING THEIR ALIEN TARGET IN THE VAST DARKNESS...
...SEEKING IT IN UNISON.

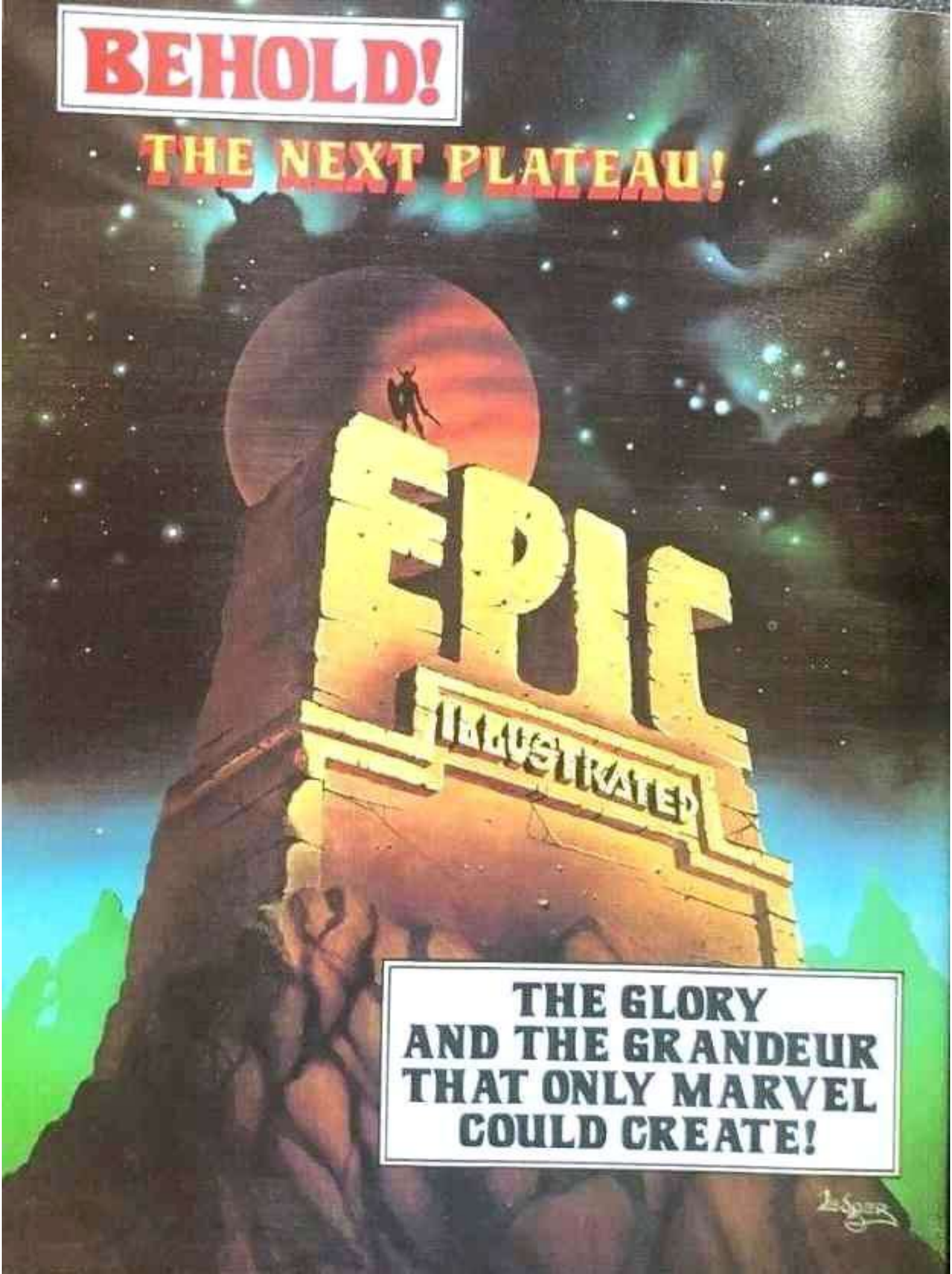
PLEASE DEAR GOD-- DON'T LET THEM MISS, PLEASE.
LIKE A SWARM OF MARAUDING BEES CHASING A HIVE WRECKING GRIZZLY, THE POTENT PROJECTILES CLOSE ON THEIR HURTLING PREY--WHICH GLOWS WHITE-HOT AS IT ENTERS EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.


QUICKENED HEARTBEATS LATER, IMPACT OCCURS WITH AN EARSPLITTING CODA SO UNLIKE THE DELICATE MUSIC SAID TO HAVE BEEN PLAYED BY THE METEOR'S MYTHOLOGICAL NAMESAKE.
MULTI-COLORED FIREWORKS BLAZE AGAINST THE BLACKNESS AS ORPHEUS BURSTS INTO A SHOWER OF RADIOACTIVE STARDUST.

AND BACK IN THE COLLAPSING COMMAND CENTER...
PL-PLEASE HELP ME! I-I AM SINKING! I CANNOT MOVE!
PAUL, YOU'VE GOT TO HELP DOCTOR DUBOV! HE'LL DROWN!
I WILL, TATIANA. BUT I HAD TO SEE IF THE MISSILES STRUCK ORPHEUS.
I HAD TO!
THIS WAY, PEOPLE.
I'VE GOT YOU, SIR. JUST LET ME PULL YOU UP.
ONCE WE MAKE IT TO THE PLATFORM, WE SHOULD BE OKAY. IF ONLY THESE BLASTED TUNNEL WALLS HOLD.
Exit
MADE IT! AND THERE'S OUR WAY OUT. LUCKILY THE MUD'S SEEPING IN MORE SLOWLY HERE, SO WE CAN TAKE A BREATHER FOR A SECOND.
57
AND THAT SUITS ME FINE, BECAUSE I'M BURSTING TO TELL ALL OF YOU SOMETHING.

IT WORKED! WE PULVERIZED IT!
WHOOPS! WE'RE NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET.
SPLOSH
HURRY UP THESE STAIRS.
THEY LEAD TO THE STREET.
I-I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THIS... NEW YORK CITY IN RUINS.
FOR A MOMENT BACK THERE, I WAS HAPPY. WE LICKED THAT METEOR... AND I'D FORGOTTEN WHAT WOULD BE AWAITING US UP HERE.
I CAN'T HELP THINKING -- SEEING THE DEVASTATION...
"... THAT THERE WAS A PURPOSE TO IT -- A LESSON SOMEWHERE TO BE LEARNED.
"PERHAPS IT WAS A SIGNAL -- A SIGN OF SOME KIND WE JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND. MAYBE THIS WAS ALL MEANT TO MAKE US STOP AND QUESTION WHAT WE'RE DOING.
"I KNOW IT SOUNDS CRAZY, BUT SOMETIMES DESTINY HAS A FUNNY WAY OF MAKING ITSELF KNOWN.
"WAS THIS CHANCE -- OR DESIGN. I WONDER... I REALLY DO."

The End.


BEHOLD!
THE NEXT PLATEAU!
EPIC
ILLUSTRATED
THE GLORY
AND THE GRANDEUR
THAT ONLY MARVEL
COULD CREATE!